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## ERNEST HEMINGWAY

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Ernest Hemingway was in Italy in the last war, first as an ambulance driver and then as a soldier with the Italian Arditi. There this young man of nineteen saw violence, death, bright sunshine, and hard, clear colors. One can live a fairly significant life among these things—more than one could amid, say, the mud of the Flanders battlefields. True, it was raining during the Caporetto retreat, but Caporetto itself was “a little white town with a campanile in a valley. It was a clean little town and there was a fine fountain in the square.” Perhaps the Italian climate gave a cleaner look to things altogether and encouraged a young man to look with sympathy, or at least with interest, on the brilliantly enameled surface of violent life and death. One could be disillusioned after the war, like everybody else, but one had some sort of an ideal to hunt after. Keep the colors bright, the edges sharp. The “reds and yellows of Shelley’s Italy” that Yeats talked about in discussing his early influences had, in Hemingway’s case, nothing to do with flowers: the red was sometimes blood and sometimes wine and the yellow was often the gilt on café signs. And then as a youngster he had played football and boxed and worked on pretty rough jobs and gone hunting with his father in northern Michigan. So he entered the feverish and disillusioned 1920’s with baggage of a different kind than that brought by the intellectuals and the bohemians who were his contemporary writers: he had acquired something of a personal tradition that was less

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troublesome than an education and more concrete than a mood. Thus, in a world inhabited by Aldous Huxley and T. S. Eliot, and for that matter by James Branch Cabell, he was not to be seen on the roads trodden by any of these. And though his path crossed that of Huxley more than once, Ernest was stoutly walking, or perhaps riding a horse, while Aldous was being driven in a closed car with the shades drawn.

What a wartime Italy had to offer might be found in Spain even during peace: here were the colors again, and the clear contours, and the violence. Indeed, you had them all together, for bullfighting is not only violent but picturesque. But Hemingway did not develop into a mere lover of picturesque action, a connoisseur of the flamboyant. He set his stories in Italy and in Spain, but he was writing neither guidebooks, travel posters, nor reminiscences. He was trying to find what he could do with his own personal tradition—what it meant, how one could live by it, how one could look at others through it. His mind reached back into his American childhood for pieces of life that fitted into the Italian and Spanish pattern, and he found it in memories of the Northwest. The lingering remains of the frontier situation in America joined up with the war and the bullfighting and gave him confidence in his view of things. He thought, too, of Cuba and Florida, for there the colors were also bright and men could be violent. And so we get the early short stories and *The Sun Also Rises*, *A Farewell to Arms*, and *To Have and To Have Not*. That he should write, too, of big-game hunting in Africa fits into the pattern.

*In Our Time* (1925), a collection of short stories and his first work to be published in book form, provides some interesting clues to Hemingway's attitude toward life and art. Here we have the three strands in the Hemingway tradition carefully brought together—the American frontier, the European war, the Spanish bullfight. By the device of sandwiching incidents dealing with the second and the third of these between stories dealing mostly with the first, the connection between all three is made explicit. We have the violence and the color and the brutality and the life. It is all to be accepted because it is life: cruelty and suffering become neutralized by vitality. There is no very clear philosophy running through these

sketches, no explicit glorification of this or that way of living or dying. From a paragraph like the following, for example, we get not approval, not even acquiescence, but an awareness that life is so, and if one trains one's self to look it in the eyes its reality becomes impressive and therefore fit subject for art.

We were in a garden in Mons. Young Buckley came in with his patrol from across the river. The first German I ever saw climbed up over the garden wall. We waited till he got one leg over and then potted him. He had so much equipment on and looked awfully surprised and fell down into the garden. Then three more came over further down the wall. We shot them. They all came just like that.

These short, staccato sentences indicate a sort of ability to make life impressive by looking with a steady gaze at its simple actuality. It is not, however, a completely pragmatic approach. Not all actuality is equally impressive or equally tractable under the hand of the artist. It must be something with a sharp edge, a clear outline, so that the clarity and the inevitability wipe out repulsion or despair. Violence is not better than passivity, but it is the type of life at its clearest, its most intense, and thus the most effective symbol of reality. Hemingway is aiming at a kind of symbolic reality. He is a sharp-eyed realist; but his realism has the job of picking out keen edges and vivid colors, or at least his style can present what he does select so that it becomes keen and vivid. A short story such as "Soldier's Home" has for its subject the passivity and lack of ambition felt by a young man after his return from the war in 1919; yet the vagueness of the emotion is cleaned up by style and presented through single symbolic incidents.

Again, in this early work Hemingway is not a sensationalist. He is not out to shock his readers into attention by the sheer horror or dreadfulness of the events he describes. There is always a quietness in the telling, an attempt to avoid by precision any suggestion of fuss or ostentation. The story is urged along gently but firmly, predicate following subject with a stern and fatalistic inevitability. This fatalism, if we might call it that, has remained a feature of Hemingway's style throughout all his work. It almost amounts to a suggestion that his personal tradition is a way of looking at life, not a substitute for it, nor even an interpretation of it, but something to

help him keep looking steadily at it without averting his gaze. Not that Hemingway tries to avoid giving away the fact that he has a principle of selection determining his choice of characters and events—there is nothing of the “naturalist” in him—but rather that he is determined to present what appears most inescapable, most typical of the nonstop flow of events.

They whack-whacked the white horse on the legs and he kneed himself up. The picador twisted the stirrups straight and pulled and hauled up into the saddle. The horse's entrails hung down in a blue bunch and swung backward and forward as he began to canter, the monos whacking him on the back of his legs with the rods. He cantered jerkily along the barrera. He stopped stiff and one of the monos held his bridle and walked him forward. The picador kicked in his spurs, leaned forward and shook his lance at the bull. Blood pumped regularly from between the horse's front legs. He was nervously unsteady. The bull could not make up his mind to charge.

The reader has a sense of powerlessness before the fact. The events are unwound before his eyes, and they cannot be stopped or altered. The movement of the sentences has the calmness of the inevitable. In all of Hemingway's short stories the significance lies in the feeling of the sheer vitality of existence, the impressiveness of the cliff-edge of events that do in fact occur, which he manages to communicate to the reader. It is not melodramatic and it is not naturalistic, but his work is both realistic and symbolic. He is less concerned with presenting life at its most universal than with expressing it at its most actual.

*The Sun Also Rises*, Hemingway's first important novel, appeared in 1926. In this work his sense of the inevitable actuality of life develops into a more clearly pessimistic attitude. Actuality as such cannot, after all, provide any standards of value. And looking at the post-war world with eyes that had accepted the violence and the color of the frontier and the war, he could not but find something lacking. And because his attitude has never been simply pragmatic, because he had never accepted existence simply as existence but always sought what had edge and sharpness to emphasize its actuality, Hemingway came to realize very acutely the bitterness of belonging to the “lost generation.” He quotes Gertrude Stein, “You are all a lost generation,” and, more significantly, goes on to quote Ecclesiastes, “One generation passeth away, and another generation



cometh; but the earth abideth forever. . . . The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to the place where he arose. . . . The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits. . . . All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again." Experience had lost its sharp edge, and a cynical and dissolute generation drifted through life instead of marching through it.

He sets these representatives of the lost generation against the vivid and colorful background of a Spanish fiesta. It is existence contrasted with life, a mere "things as they are" set against a flaming actuality. It is in terms of this contrast that the whole story is constructed. As before, the technique employed is a symbolic realism, each character and each event taking its place on one side or the other. The hero himself, with his physical and spiritual disability resulting from a war wound, synthesizes the two groups, for as the result of violence (i.e., of significant actuality) he is condemned to join the company and activities of those for whom life is mere existence. This book is Hemingway's contribution to the spate of "wasteland" literature that was appearing at this time. A comparison with Aldous Huxley's early novels suggests itself at once, and the comparison is illuminating. The characters in *Crome Yellow* and *Point Counter Point* illustrate what happens to a generation when ethical and other norms have disappeared. Huxley is concerned with the fact that people can no longer believe in traditional values, and as a result their life becomes a futile and dreary search for something in which they do not believe, anyway. But for Hemingway it is not the ideal, the end, that has gone, but something in the quality of life itself. It is not (as it is in Huxley) that his characters do not know where they are going, but that they do not go anywhere with the proper intensity and vitality. They seek to give a semblance of intensity to their living through drink, travel, or by *watching* the intense life of others. The fiesta and the bullfights at Pamplona represent, to the English and American observers, a lost way of living (not a lost ideal but a lost technique). Occasionally one or two of the characters almost rediscover the lost technique (as in

the fishing expedition), but hardly have they done so when they are dragged back into the life of the lost generation again. Reality lies either in the past or with a foreign civilization. The color and the vividness of their Spanish surroundings represent something to which they cannot attain.

A waiter went for a taxi. It was hot and bright. Up the street was a little square with trees and grass where there were taxis parked. A taxi came up the street, the waiter hanging out at the side. I tipped him and told the driver where to drive, and got in beside Brett. The driver started up the street. I settled back. Brett moved close to me. . . . I put my arm around her and she rested against me comfortably. It was very hot and bright, and the houses looked sharply white. We turned out on to the Gran Via.

"Oh, Jake," Brett said, "we could have had such a damned good time together."

Ahead was a mounted policeman in khaki directing traffic. He raised his baton. The car slowed suddenly pressing Brett against me. "Yes," I said. "Isn't it pretty to think so?"

This is the conclusion of the book, and it is, like all the rest, symbolic. The day is hot and bright, and the houses are "sharply white"; but these things are outside the characters, serving to remind them of a kind of life they cannot lead. They can only think "pretty" thoughts concerning what they might in the past have been able to do. The word "pretty" has a very precise function in this final paragraph. It suggests the very opposite of any intensity of feeling: it is the trivial equivalent of "beautiful." The book ends on a note of nostalgia with a deliberate emphasis on present impotence and triviality.

The personal tradition of living that Hemingway developed for himself as a result of his contact with the frontier situation in America (not in the historical sense, of course, but in a more general one) and of his wartime experience in Italy as a young man led him first to express his sense of the relation between the three different representatives of that tradition ("tough" life in America; the war; bullfighting in Spain), and this he did in his early short stories; then to show his dissatisfaction with the life of the immediate post-war years, which he did, in *The Sun Also Rises*, by observing it in terms of his tradition and finding it wanting; and then, as a third stage, to try to recapture those elements in the past that had molded that

tradition, to look back and bid farewell to the violent and intense living of earlier days, and this he did in *A Farewell to Arms* (1929). The fourth stage was to find contemporary substitutes—in the bullfight, in big-game hunting, in the life of the outcast and adventurer, in the class struggle; and eventually, in the Spanish civil war, he discovered not only a modern situation that fulfilled the requirements of the tradition that had been formed by his youthful experiences but one that was powerful enough to throw new light on the past, to redefine it and interpret it, so that with *For Whom the Bell Tolls* the tradition itself changes, becoming more adequate and more comprehensive and—in the fullest sense of the word—more civilized.

It is important to remember the title of *A Farewell to Arms*: the book is in a sense a tribute out of the wasteland to the departed glory. Hemingway is very far from glorifying war as such. It is not the war that is glorious, but the general physical and emotional background is capable of giving intensity and vividness to experience. The lyrical love story, which some critics have quite wrongly seen as artificially grafted on to the book, is shown as becoming what it is because of the background against which it is set. It is in immediate contrast to the sordid love scenes in *The Sun Also Rises*, where the futility of the relations between the principal characters is shown up by being set against the picturesque vitality of the fiesta. In *A Farewell to Arms* the love of hero and heroine becomes intense because of the background, while in the earlier book real love is impossible because the characters show up so poorly against the background.

The brief idyl that precedes the final tragedy in *A Farewell to Arms* is a sort of Indian summer of intense living before the winter of post-war futility descends. In the story itself the tragedy is not shown as resulting from the cessation of hostilities and the arrival of the world of the 1920's, but the death of the heroine in childbirth is in a sense symbolic of this. The hero gives up the career of arms, goes from Italy to Switzerland as a civilian, and there the meaning in his life is snuffed out. The truth behind Hemingway's symbolic realism here can be seen explicitly expressed in an early short story—called simply "A Very Short Story"—which contains the germ of

the later novel. In the short story the tragic ending of the love of hero and heroine comes not by the death of the heroine but with the hero's return to a peacetime America and the frittering-away of their love in sordidness and triviality. "Othello's occupation's gone," quotes someone ironically in *The Sun Also Rises*, and the reference is illuminating. The complete quotation, indeed, is very relevant.

Farewell the plumed troop and the big wars  
That make ambition virtue! O, farewell,  
Farewell the neighing steed and the shrill trump,  
The spirit-stirring drum, the ear-piercing fife,  
The royal banner and all quality,  
Pride, pomp and circumstance of glorious war!  
And, O you mortal engines, whose rude throats  
The immortal Jove's dread clamours counterfeit,  
Farewell! Othello's occupation's gone!

This might have stood as a motto to *A Farewell to Arms*. Vividness and intensity gave life meaning, and when these qualities departed, the meaning went out of life itself. Henceforth Hemingway was to be engaged in an attempt to recapture those qualities or to find an alternative meaning in life. In *For Whom the Bell Tolls* he came very near to doing both.

After *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway did not write another novel for eight years. He was trying to find a world of intense living that would satisfy his personal tradition, and the novel was too rigid a form to be used for the recording of such a search. He tried short stories—already in 1927, in *Men without Women*, he had produced short stories which picked out scenes and moments of "intense actuality" from American life—and miscellaneous forms of writing. It was in these years of search that Hemingway developed that characteristic "toughness" with which he has been popularly associated. Scenes of cruelty, of horror, and of tough "he-mannishness" flash through his work. But to accuse him of sadism or exhibitionism is to misunderstand what he was doing. The "he-man" was the most obvious symbol of the kind of intense life for which he was searching, and it is natural that he should come to the fore during this period. It is also natural that Hemingway should have produced some of his least effective work during this time. He was experimenting with situations that would compensate him for the lost

tradition. In *Death in the Afternoon* (1932) he presented a complete and elaborate study of bullfighting—and we have seen the part played by the bullfight in the development of Hemingway's attitude. In *Green Hills of Africa* (1935) he became the tough sportsman, good with his gun, hard-boiled yet romantically in love with his wife, laconic yet picturesque in expression. His characteristic style began to run to seed here. The static quality of his work during the previous six years was becoming apparent. He was still trying to find a situation which would allow him to use his tradition, but the tradition was wearing a little thin by now—it was pretty far from its source. A certain staginess became noticeable in his work, as though he were parodying his former self—and indeed in a sense he was. His writing became a sort of incantation for the purpose of calling up the young Hemingway hunting with his father or driving an ambulance in the clear air of Italy, or at least for fulfilling the ideals created by his experiences in those days.

*To Have and To Have Not* followed in 1937. More like a series of linked short stories than an adequately welded novel, this book represents a further attempt to find a substitute in the contemporary world for the world of intense actuality that he was seeking to recapture. The hero, Harry Morgan, is—to quote the blurb on the jacket—"perhaps the most complete *real* masculine character that Ernest Hemingway has created." This is revealing: it shows that Hemingway was at this stage in his search succumbing to the temptation of taking the slickest way to the life he was looking for—via the he-man, the almost superman, basically upright (though guilty to conventional eyes) and unrighteously oppressed, symbol of the hero held down by the unfair trickery of a world unworthy of him. The blurb on the jacket is worth quoting in full, for it sums up the theme of the novel perfectly.

Morgan is a native of Key West, Florida—that paradise of the "haves" and purgatory of the "have nots." He owns a fast motor boat in which he takes out fishing parties, runs rum, guns and sometimes human contraband. His life is a lonely struggle to keep himself, his wife, and daughters away from the edge of the "have not" category. All his life he has played a lone hand in a hard world and it is only in the climax of the novel . . . that he realizes the failure of his philosophy. [That failure lay in his individualism. A man cannot change the world alone, he finally discovered.] As a contrast to Morgan and his "conch"



associates, Mr. Hemingway portrays the wealthy wasters, literary weaklings, oversexed women and languid men who with their palatial yachts make up the "haves." Their lives and that of Harry Morgan, although on different levels, frequently touch, and when they do the contact is electrical in effect.

It is clear that in this book Hemingway comes very close to creating a myth for the expression of his sense of the importance of intensity and vividness in life. The trouble with the book is that it is part mythology and part realistic fiction, and each part makes the other look unconvincing. There are some admirable passages of keen and clear-cut writing in the book; but if Hemingway is going to depend on a mythology to make his points, these passages will become unnecessary. The opening is in his very best vein.

You know how it is there early in the morning in Havana with the bums still asleep against the walls of the buildings; before even the ice wagons come by with ice for the bars? Well, we came across the square from the dock to the Pearl of San Francisco Café to get coffee and there was only one beggar awake in the square and he was getting a drink out of the fountain. But when we got inside the café and sat down, there were the three of them waiting for us.

Here the speed, the precision, the adroit placing of the images, and the cunning use of proper names make a style more effective, even, than that of *A Farewell to Arms*, which was always threatened by a false simplicity, a forced primitivism, that has been a common fault in Hemingway. Nearly all the chapters in *To Have and To Have Not* open well but threaten to go to pieces later on, when the conflict between realism, symbolism, and mythology confuse the reader's expectations and his criteria of truth. The trouble was that Hemingway had been standing still emotionally for about eight years; he was still seeking substitutes in the present for something that impressed him in the past. What he had to learn was to treat the present in its own right. It was time he stopped repeating his farewell to arms; stopped presenting the world in terms of frontier, battle, and bullfight; stopped being "tough."

The Spanish civil war was the *deus ex machina* of Hemingway. It gave him a chance to look at the vivid life again and see it not only as interesting or impressive because of its vividness but as bound up—part cause, part effect—with a profound human situation. Under its influence Hemingway was able to extend his sym-

bolic realism to become not merely descriptive but also interpretative.

Hemingway's personal and political development and his experience in Spain during the Spanish war combined in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* to enrich his art. He is attempting here to carry forward all his old experiences into this new experience and out of the resulting unity of mood to create a richly patterned fable whose function is not only to display the world but to interpret it. Thus the hero is a young American who explains to himself his interest and participation in the Loyalist cause in terms of his own background and ancestry: past, present, and future meet in a moment, and the conclusion of the book shows us the hero awaiting his death as he lies wounded in the path of the Fascist advance.

I'd like to tell grandfather about this one. I'll bet he never had to go over and find his people and do a show like this. How do you know? He may have done fifty. No, he said. Be accurate. Nobody did any fifty like this one. Nobody did five. Nobody did one maybe not just like this. Sure. They must have.

His grandfather, who had fought in the Civil War, is brought in to unify and interpret the conclusion.

The book has faults: in seeking to enrich the implications of the story Hemingway pads it out too much. It is in some respects less clear, less bright, and less simple than *A Farewell to Arms*. But in the later book he has tackled a much more difficult problem; he is no longer aiming at the kind of surface art that he achieved in the earlier one. The Caporetto retreat in *A Farewell to Arms* is shown as a clearly seen and vivid particular event, while even the slightest movements of the characters in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* are more than visualized events—they are integral parts of a complex human situation, parts not only of its presentation but of its interpretation. And the love story that runs through the book is both an interpretation of, and is interpreted by, all the other events. The "dialectic" of the work is much more complex than in anything that Hemingway had previously written.

Hemingway did not reach this stage in his development at a single jump. He experimented with the Spanish war theme in plays and short stories for quite a long time before he saw his material in the proper perspective. But the story, once conceived and written,

clearly represents a new beginning in his career as writer. It may not be as perfect of its kind as *A Farewell to Arms*, but it is a maturer kind of art. If we compare, for example, the way in which he handles description of terrain in the two novels this point becomes apparent at once. In the earlier book the author's discerning eye and sense of terrain is as much in evidence as it is in the later, but all he does is to present individual vivid situations; in the later book scenery is itself handled tragically—the hill, the bridge, the pass, are devices for focusing emotion and drawing out the implications of the story. And his style has gained a dimension; it is no longer a simple melody but a richly balanced harmony. Indeed, the very title indicates that the book is a drawing-together of strands, a unification of separate elements: “. . . Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls: it tolls for thee.”

In short, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* shows Hemingway abandoning the personal tradition that he had carried with him since his youth and through which he had looked at life for over a decade in favor of a maturer tradition which includes the earlier without contradicting it. He had escaped from what threatened to become a vicious circle and was at last able to develop and enrich an art that had too long been marking time.

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### FAULKNER'S POINT OF VIEW

WARREN BECK<sup>1</sup>

Criticism of William Faulkner's novels has diverged conspicuously between two tendencies. Some of the most discerning have praised Faulkner highly; for instance, six years ago Mark Van Doren spoke of his possessing “one of the greatest natural gifts to be found anywhere in America,” and Conrad Aiken's recent article in the *Atlantic* was on the whole constructively appreciative. Even Henry Seidel Canby, after having written of *Sanctuary* that it showed “no concern for significance,” “no predilection for ‘ought,’ ”

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came around two years later to say of *Light in August*, "It is a novel of extraordinary force and insight . . . and filled with that spirit of compassion which saves those who look at life too closely from hardness and despair. . . . I think that no one can deny it the praise of life caught in its intensities both good and bad." Yet much journalistic criticism of Faulkner has continued to be detractory, sometimes even abusive; and such is almost always the tone toward him in those volumes on contemporary fiction which American professors write for their students and for one another.

This failure of much American criticism properly to evaluate and support the novels of William Faulkner seems based chiefly on two erroneous propositions—first, that Faulkner has no ideas, no point of view, and, second, that consequently he is melodramatic, a mere sensationalist. One academic critic has called his work the *reductio ad absurdum* of American naturalism and complains that there is "no cosmic echo . . . behind his atrocities"; another calls Faulkner's profound masterpiece *Absalom, Absalom!* disappointing, in that it presents "an experience of limited value"; another says Faulkner "is not a novelist of ideas but of mood and action, physical and psychic"—as though mood and action were antithetical to ideas, instead of their legitimate artistic media in fiction. Of Faulkner's whole work a dogmatic sectarian critic (who within three pages makes four mistakes of fact about the stories) says that "to read these books is to cross a desert of terrifying nihilism" and accuses Faulkner of almost mathematically computing a maximum of shock. Another, characterizing *Light in August* as "murder and rape turning on the spit over the flames of arson," says that in this book "nothing is omitted, except virtue."

One of the most recent insults to Faulkner's artistic integrity is Burton Rascoe's suggestion that he plays with his material and his readers, that he writes with his tongue in his cheek. Following the vogue of denying Faulkner any philosophic outlook and purpose, another academician accuses him of "the calculated manufacture of superfluous horrors." "He is a belated literary descendent of Edgar Allen Poe," writes one of the professors, in a favorite and utterly false correlation. "He works like Poe," says another, "to freeze the reader's blood"; still another says, "He stresses the grotesque and

horrible to the point where they become simply ludicrous." Taking up where the pedagogues leave off, one leading periodical reviewer hurls the epithet "Mississippi Frankenstein"; another, in a title, sums up Faulkner's achievement as "witchcraft."

Perhaps the most obvious of these errors is the comparison to Poe. The association of ideas is typical of these critics' superficiality; Poe deals in horror, Faulkner presents horror—therefore Faulkner is like Poe. Horror is of different kinds, however. The essence of Poe's frightful fiction is unreality, product of a morbid taste for prearranged nightmares and self-induced hallucinations, that narcissism of the imagination which is the seamy side of romanticism. Faulkner, on the other hand, is a brilliant realist. In Poe's most typical stories there is little evidence that he studied other human beings, but it seems certain that Faulkner, like his character Gavin Stevens the attorney, might have been seen "squatting among the overalls on the porches of country stores for a whole summer afternoon, talking to them in their own idiom about nothing at all."

Indeed, if Faulkner in all his work does not have his eye studiously on the object, a locale and its *dramatis personae*, his has been a very foresighted piece of fabrication, for *The Hamlet*, published in 1940 but telling a story of the 1890's, is glanced back at in its details in *As I Lay Dying* (1930) and in *Sanctuary* (1931), and there are many other systematic connections back and forth between the novels, especially in reference to the tribes of Sartoris, Compson, Sutpen, and Snopes. On the map of Yoknapatawpha County appended to *Absalom, Absalom!* Faulkner writes himself down as "sole owner and proprietor," but this community centering in Jefferson either has more than a coincidental resemblance, however synthetic, to real Mississippians white, black, and brown, or else William Faulkner is running both God and the devil a close second as a creator and confounder of human beings. Unmistakably, whatever horror there is in Faulkner—and there is a great deal—is out of life.

It may be the very brilliance of Faulkner's realism that has confused others of the critics; details may have so startled them that they have missed the subtle implications of idea in the novels. Certainly the implications are there. While Faulkner differs radi-



cally from Poe in being a close observer and realistic reporter of the human tragedy, he departs just as radically from the naturalistic school's baldly objective, documentary method. He is constantly interpretive; he sees his subjects in the light of humane predilections, and thus his realism always intends signification. This lifts his most extreme passages above sensationalism; and striking as his scenes are, his conception of novels as meaningful wholes is still more impressive, at least for qualified attentive readers.

Faulkner's interpretive bent has also led him to transcend the modern realists' cult of a simply factual diction and colloquial construction and to employ instead a full, varied, and individual style. Perhaps, too, some of the unappreciative critics may have evaded the challenge of this style, with its overtone, ellipsis, and suspension, and so may have missed Faulkner's themes in somewhat the way of a high-school student reading *Hamlet* only as a melodramatic series of murders. However, the widely proclaimed frustrations over Faulkner's style, like the revulsions against his realism, will be dispelled once his point of view is grasped, for this style is a powerful instrument handled for the most part with great skill for the realization of his ideas.

William Faulkner's view of human life is one of the most pessimistic ever voiced in fiction, and his writing, like Mr. Compson's "sloped whimsical ironic hand out of Mississippi attenuated," is of a predominantly melancholy tone. "All breath," he says in *The Wild Palms*, has as its only immortality, "its infinite capacity for folly and pain." Not often, however, does Faulkner speak in his own right, out of the omniscience of third-person narrative, for he is devoted to dramatic form and to the perspective it supplies, and most of his stories are told largely through the consciousness of participant characters. And even when Faulkner himself speaks, through third-person narrative, he usually keys his utterance to the mood of the scene and makes himself the lyrical mouthpiece of his characters' experiences. Consequently, it is not possible to comprehend Faulkner's point of view from separate quotations but only from implications in his novels as wholes and from the positions of his various characters in relation to these implied themes.

His critics have sometimes failed to make the necessary distinc-

tion between the statements of his dramatic characters and his own ideas. The words of Mr. Compson, "history is an illusion of philosophers and fools," are shoved back into Faulkner's own mouth by one recent critic and are made basis for asserting that Faulkner never transcends the level of bare perception but sees the universe as "bereft of authentic proprieties and the accents of logic," when certainly his keen sense of authentic proprieties and the accents of logic is part of Faulkner's artistic inspiration—a central part of that superhuman unrest in him which has produced so prolifically and so passionately.

Undoubtedly Faulkner, like any other novelist or dramatist, stands behind some of his characters, but which are his spokesmen cannot be decided except in terms of the preponderance and system of his ideas. Therefore it should be noted, for example, that in *Mosquitoes* it is not Faulkner but the flippant Semitic who declares that man's tendency to follow illusions to his death must be "some grand cosmic scheme for fertilizing the earth"; it is an ignorant, bitter man crazed by greed for supposed treasure—Armstid in *The Hamlet*—whom the author describes as digging himself "back into that earth which had produced him to be its born and fated thrall forever until he died"; and it is a man heartbroken by his wife's death—Houston in *The Hamlet*—who felt himself "victim of a useless and elaborate practical joke at the hands of the prime maniacal Risibility."

Even Faulkner's dramatization of such negative characters need not mislead the critic if he contemplates such portraits in their entirety—Houston's disenchantment, for instance, does not include a surrender to apathy, for he not only viewed the idiot Ike Snopes at his worst with "furious exasperation which was not rage but savage contempt and pity for all blind flesh capable of hope and grief," but he gave the poor fellow what help he could. Thus the reporter in *Pylon* says you "walk the earth with your arm crooked over your head to dodge until you finally get the old blackjack at last and can lay back down again," but in spite of that despairing view he is sympathetic and aggressively philanthropic.

Pity is significantly a common emotion among Faulkner's characters. The old justice who appears incidentally but vividly in the

closing pages of *The Hamlet* looks at Mrs. Armstid, the victim of her husband's stubborn folly and Flem Snopes's rapacity, "with pity and grief." Hightower, in *Light in August*, murmurs "Poor man. Poor mankind," and his words encompass not only the negro murderer but his victim and the people who now pursue him. Such humane sensitivity is epitomized when Faulkner calls the reporter in *Pylon* "patron (even if no guardian) saint of all waifs, all the homeless the desperate and the starved," and describes him as manifesting "that air of worn and dreamy fury which Don Quixote must have had."

In many of Faulkner's stories there is the compassionate troubled observer—Quentin Compson in *The Sound and the Fury* and in *Absalom, Absalom!*, a whole chorus of country folk one by one in *As I Lay Dying*, Benbow in *Sanctuary*, Hightower in *Light in August*, the reporter in *Pylon*, and Ratliff in *The Hamlet*. In *The Unvanquished*, Bayard Sartoris, while closely involved in the action, also evolves into a typical Faulknerian observer as he matures. It is no doubt significant of Faulkner's own attitude that these compassionate observers so largely provide the reflective point of view from which the story is told and thereby determine its moral atmosphere. This typical technique is in itself refutation of the charge that Faulkner is nihilistic and merely sensational. Indeed, it shows that the intention of Faulkner's temperament is idealistic, while its awareness of the preponderant realities of human behavior is pessimistic, and hence its conviction is a melancholy which recoils in protest. This protest is, of course, not didactic but rather inheres in an implicative tone, which the imaginative reader will not miss and will respect for its art as well as its idealism.

The skeptical may test this thesis fairly by re-reading *Sanctuary* (not the most skilful or organic of Faulkner's narratives) with attention fixed primarily on Horace Benbow. His unrest amid hypocrisies and viciousness and his fanatical resistance suffice to throw the events of the book into their true ethical perspective. Faulkner's exuberant and as yet undisciplined realism at times carried him into digression, as with Virgil and Fonzo at Madame Reba's house, or Red's riotous funeral, or the unassimilated and hence anticlimactic documentary chapter on Popeye's youth; however, behind the

main events of the plot is the brooding corrective spirit of the perfectionist Benbow, bringing the rich imagery and profusion of fact into harmony with the dire theme. And what Faulkner achieves not without extravagances in *Sanctuary* can be found done better in *Light in August* and done to perfection in *Absalom, Absalom!*

Naturally revulsion often carries these compassionate observers into aloofness. The clergyman Hightower, perhaps the most broadly sympathetic of all, is also the most detached. Deprived of his pulpit because of his wife's scandalous behavior, he has lived alone and inactive for years; and when he hears that the posse is about to catch Joe Christmas, he refuses to be involved, saying to himself, "I won't! I won't! I have bought immunity. I have paid." Later when Byron Bunch comes to him with Lena's troubles and those of Mrs. Hines and Joe, the tears run down his cheeks like sweat as he says, "But it is not right to bother me, to worry me, when I have—when I have taught myself to stay—have been taught by them to stay—That this should come to me, taking me after I am old." Quentin Compson's revulsion is still more acute, for he is more severely involved through his sister's disgrace, and he retreats all the way into self-annihilation. Even the quizzical self-possessed Ratliff, in *The Hamlet*, pauses somewhere between despair and defiance to thank God "men have done learned how to forget quick what they ain't brave enough to try to cure." Benbow makes a more direct and moodier self-accusation—"I lack courage: that was left out of me. The machinery is all here, but it won't run." And Ratliff, after stepping in several times on the side of the angels, cries out to a companion, "I could do more, but I won't. I won't, I tell you!"

These retreats are not repudiations of principle; they are simply a natural human weakness and weariness, which Faulkner represents dramatically for purposes of characterization, and which serve also the artistic method of vicissitude. It is significant that the pendulum of mood usually swings back to positive assertion; Hightower and Benbow and the reporter, for instance, return again and again to the struggle. Even the crazed Quentin Compson realizes that beyond despair is something still more intolerable—indifference; he says, "It's not when you realize that nothing can help you—

religion, pride, anything—it's when you realize that you don't need any aid." Benbow, oppressed by "the evil, the injustice, the tears," lets himself think it might be better if Goodwin, the woman and her child, Popeye, and he himself too were all dead, "cauterized out of the old and tragic flank of the world," and goes on to imagine "perhaps it is upon the instant that we realize, admit that there is a logical pattern to evil, that we die"; but he does not cease to postulate and appeal to a logical pattern of good in his efforts to save a falsely accused man and to befriend that man's family. Quentin Compson is obsessed by his father's teaching that "all men are just accumulations dolls stuffed with sawdust swept up from the trash heaps where all previous dolls had been thrown away the sawdust flowing from what wound in what side that not for me died not," but nevertheless he cannot accept his father's argument that virginity is just words.

These characters' refusal to surrender principle even when they seem overmatched by circumstance not only intensifies their melancholy, and Faulkner's, but enhances it with human dignity. Indeed, in the darkest pages of these novels Faulkner and his compassionate spectators often exemplify Carlyle's dictum that a man's sorrow is the inverted image of his nobility. The reporter in *Pylon* tells his editor that he tried to let the fliers alone but couldn't—couldn't refrain, that is, from the impulse to help them, in spite of their desperate state beyond his help, and his own acknowledged awkwardness. Benbow says he "cannot stand idly by and see injustice," and when Miss Jenny suggests Pilate's cynical query, Benbow declares himself still moved to oppose what he identifies as "that irony which lurks in events." When Goodwin's woman assumes that she must give herself to Benbow in lieu of cash payment for his legal services, he says, "Can't you see that perhaps a man might do something just because he knew it was right, necessary to the harmony of things that it be done?" Ratliff similarly asserts that in opposing the Snopes clan he was "protecting something that don't want nothing but to walk and feel the sun and wouldn't know how to hurt no man even if it would and wouldn't want to even if it could, just like I wouldn't stand by and see you steal a meat-bone from a dog."



Even the skeptical Mr. Compson often shows awareness that the moral issue is not figmentary. He sees human virtue manifested sometimes in acts of apparent evil—"Have you noticed," he asks Quentin, "how so often when we try to reconstruct the causes which lead up to the actions of men and women, how with a sort of astonishment we find ourselves now and then reduced to the belief, the only possible belief, that they stemmed from some of the old virtues? the thief who steals not for greed but for love, the murderer who kills not out of lust but pity?" Thus the man whose motives the Compsons try to reconstruct—Thomas Sutpen—is driven on in his acquisitiveness, they find, by a boyhood complex of honor; and even in his materialistic pride he holds himself to a code which will not let him traduce the wife who deceived him. The persistence of such moral resolution in Faulkner's beset and melancholy characters is typified in Judith Sutpen's feeling that "it can't matter . . . and yet it must matter because you keep on trying."

Closely related to this attitude, and furnishing another fixed point in the ethics of Faulkner's characters, is an idealization of honesty. The aristocratic Rosa Millard, in *The Unvanquished*, never whipped her grandson for anything but lying and prayed for pardon for herself after she had lied to a Yankee officer to protect her family; later, having obtained mules by forged requisitions upon Union troops and having sold them back to other Union troops for gold, she confesses before the congregation, asks their prayers, and then distributes the money among them as she had intended. When at last she is murdered by carpet-baggers, the negro boy Ringo says discerningly of her, "It wasn't him or Ab Snopes either that kilt her. It was them mules. That first batch of mules we got for nothing." Nor is this integrity represented as limited to the aristocrats of the Old South. Addie Bundren, the country woman, believed "deceit was such that, in a world where it was, nothing else could be very bad or very important." Her carpenter son Cash holds to what he calls "the olden right teaching that says to drive the nails down and trim the edges well always like it was for your own use and comfort you were making it," and so great is his passion for rightness that when asked how far he fell when he broke his leg, he answers, "Twenty-eight foot, four and a half inches, about." Relevantly, honest Cash

is the Bundren who judges most fairly the erratic brother Darl, crediting his motives even while condemning his acts. Byron Bunch is another honest workman; he keeps his own time strictly when he works alone at the mill, and he says, "It beats all how some folks think that making or getting money is a kind of game where there are not any rules at all." No wonder that, when Hightower hears Byron's class disdainfully called "hillbillies," he says, "They are fine people, though. Fine men and women." Another example is in *The Wild Palms*; the lost convict has the woman wash his prison suit, while he goes barebacked in the blistering sun; then he wraps up the clean suit, saving it for his return; and Faulkner himself remarks that the woman said nothing, "since she too doubtless knew what his reason was, . . . she too had stemmed at some point from the same dim hill-bred Abraham."

Often the unassuming virtue of simple people provides the foil to evil and furnishes the atmospheric tension in Faulkner's scenes, as, for instance, an incidental character in *The Hamlet*, a farmer whose gentility is symbolized by the spray of peach blossoms he holds in his teeth, who plows the Armstid field so that Mrs. Armstid won't be forced to do it but who will not answer when Ratliff asks how many hours he has put in for his neighbor, this detail pointing up Henry Armstid's brutality to his wife and Flem Snopes's ruthless seizure of the five dollars she had earned weaving. In the same way the professional integrity and chivalry of the flier Roger Shumann, in *Pylon*, contrasts with the commercial trickery and inhumanity of the airport promoters. Thus Faulkner furnishes frames of moral reference, not only by suggesting ideals through his repellent pictures of their opposites but by showing protagonists of them among all sorts of men and women.

And thus Faulkner's deep pessimism does not proceed from a denial of values but from a melancholy recognition of the great weight of evil opposition to very real values. Not much can be done for the Mrs. Armstids in a community overrun by rapacious Snopeses, nor can Benbow effectually help Goodwin and his woman against Popeye's viciousness, Temple's treachery, and the mob's intolerance and brutality. Thus when Faulkner's compassionate observers actually intervene, they are quite often defeated. Byron

Bunch is the most successful of them all, and that perhaps because he largely shifts to Hightower the paralyzing contemplative function and himself seeks simply to protect and cherish the abandoned Lena and her child. Lena is a still simpler character, representing the will to life in an elementary human form, and she passes through Jefferson at the time of Miss Burden's murder and the mobbing of Joe Christmas as untouched and unperturbed as Eck Snopes's little boy among the wild horses that injured grown men. Most of Faulkner's characters are more complex and less stable than Lena; they are far gone in all sorts of involvements, either with others or with their own fantasies. Hence conflict and impasse in lives where suffering prevails and succor is difficult.

Under the resultant emotional strain Faulkner's characters sometimes attribute malevolence to the cosmos, but they more often see men themselves as the direct agents of evil. The whole theme of Faulkner's early work, *Mosquitoes*, seems to be that humans pester one another insufferably by passionate encroachments of one egotism upon another. Seeing these aggressive tendencies accumulated in social pressures, Wilbourne, the lover in *The Wild Palms*, who attempts with Charlotte to escape out of the world, thinks "you are born submerged in anonymous lockstep with the teeming anonymous myriads of your time and generation; you get out of step once, falter once, and you are trampled to death." And the ironic repercussions of consequence are inevitable. In *Sanctuary* young Gowan Stevens says he has injured no one but himself by his folly, whereas his drunken blundering had actually set into motion the whole chain of events that brought, besides Temple's debauchment, the deaths of Tommy, Red, and Goodwin. Hightower thinks "it is any man's privilege to destroy himself, so long as he does not injure any one else," but then almost at once he realizes that his ego had been the instrument of his wife's despair and shame.

When the parachute jumper in *Pylon* tells the reporter goodbye, he thanks him for "trying to help," but he advises, "Stick to the kind of people you are used to after this." That, however, is difficult counsel, not only for the reporter, but for most of Faulkner's characters. They are not used to one another, never become used to one another; they are as Addie Bundren sees human beings, "each with

his and her secret and selfish thought, and blood strange to each other blood." A key to the enigma of this separation may be found in a bit of omniscient narrative where Faulkner says, "Man knows so little about his fellows. In his eyes all men or women act upon what he believes would motivate him if he were mad enough to do what that other man or woman is doing." *If he were mad enough.* To the spectator, mankind seems predominantly irrational. This does not mean that Faulkner himself repudiates rationality; he seems rather to hold with the judge, in the short story "Beyond," who says he cannot divorce himself from reason enough to accept the pleasant and labor-saving theory of nihilism.

Faulkner's own inclination is shown by his endowing his most positive characters, his observers, with two primary elements of rationality—inquiry and disinterestedness—and with the reasonable man's idealization of justice. Yet in the whole body of Faulkner's work the results thus far of man's struggles toward rational self-control and social adjustment are not shown to be encouraging. The rector in *Soldiers' Pay* is convinced that man learns scarcely anything as he goes through this world and nothing whatever of help or benefit. The open conflict between human passions and rationality, and, alternatively, the unsatisfactory compromises of that conflict in woodenly conventional restraints, create the paradoxes so poignantly dramatized in Faulkner's most abstractly symbolic story, *The Wild Palms*. Wilbourne repudiates man's self-imposed systems and tries to live all for love; the convict, swept away on the flooded river, laboriously returns himself, the woman he had been told to rescue, and even the boat he was sent in; both men get prison sentences. The ironic dissonances of this somber novel, its dilemmas of escape and surrender, love and suffering, freedom and fate, and basically of reason and passion, give an incomparable suggestion of the confused and turbulent life of man in his present stage of imperfect mental and moral development.

Tull, in *As I Lay Dying*, suggests a severe functional limitation of the human brain: "It's like a piece of machinery: it won't stand a whole lot of racking." Perhaps Faulkner's frequent inclusion of feeble-minded characters is the result not only of their horrid fascination for his own acutely sensitive and subtle consciousness, but

also to emphasize the precariousness and difficulty of rationality, the resemblance of the supposedly sane and the insane, and the short distance thus far traveled in the evolution of mind. The idiot, in the cow-stealing episode in *The Hamlet*, is described as one who "is learning fast now, who has learned success and then precaution and secrecy and how to steal and even providence; who has only lust and greed and bloodthirst and a moral conscience to keep him awake at night, yet to acquire." Thus far human rationality is not strong enough to rule out lust, greed, and bloodthirst; it can only recoil at them, usually after indulging them. And Cash suggests that there is little distinction between the various stages of supposed rationality in man: "I ain't so sho that ere a man has the right to say what is crazy and what aint. It's like there was a fellow in every man that's done a-past the sanity or the insanity, that watches the sane and the insane doings of that man with the same horror and the same astonishment."

There may be no such detached and perceptive fellow in every man, or even in most men; but there is such a fellow in William Faulkner, and all his works show his horror and astonishment, proceeding from an exacting and outraged idealism. Faulkner's integrity is all the more obvious in that his is an advanced outpost's stand against odds, the odds of the predominance of base passions over supposed rationality and their resultant confusions in the average man. The desperateness of the issue, as he pictures it, is what gives his books their startling intensity, unequaled in our contemporary fiction. Faulkner's own extreme mood, growing out of his absolute demands, has been so powerfully communicated that reading him is like an actual experience of catastrophe—not only the "lightning and tempest, battle, murder, and sudden death" from which all men would be delivered, but, what is still more terrifying, "all inordinate and sinful affections."

His is, indeed, an apocalyptic vision of sin and of its complex consequences. He is unsurpassed in recording those spasms of greed and lustfulness and animosity that eclipse human qualities and saddle men with fixations which are not so much ideas as appetites. He has epitomized such crises in his record of Jiggs, the mechanic



in *Pylon*, as he goes on drinking: "He could have heard sounds, even voices, from the alley beneath the window if he had been listening. But he was not. All he heard now was that thunderous silence and solitude in which man's spirit crosses the eternal repetitive rubicon of his vice in the instant after the terror and before the triumph becomes dismay—the moral and spiritual waif shrieking his feeble I-am-I into the desert of chance and disaster." Faulkner can picture as well the despair of the rational and well-intentioned when they contemplate uncontrollable suffusions of passion in others and oppose their results. Such, on a broad narrative scale, is Ratliff confronting Snopes, Benbow maneuvering against Popeye and the townspeople, Bayard Sartoris resisting his father and Drusilla, and Quentin Compson viewing his family in *The Sound and the Fury* and the South's evil genius in *Absalom, Absalom!*

Those who lack Faulkner's knowledge of good and evil, or lack his courage in facing knowledge, may shut their eyes and put their hands over their ears while they gibber about Frankenstein or nihilism. Such ostrich tactics become increasingly ridiculous in a world where a recrudescence of irrationality and brutal passions have pointed up for even the most impercipient those melancholy facts about human nature and progress which Faulkner has confronted all along and has unequivocally attacked. A virile critical approach will first recognize the coherent rationality and humanity of Faulkner's point of view, and might then profitably go on to its particular sources, in Faulkner's own experience and in his contemplation of his native South, past and present, and so might finally come to a reappraisal of his narrative techniques, so brilliantly adapted to his profound artistic visions.

## CHAUCER: 1340-1940<sup>1</sup>

R. A. JELLIFFE<sup>2</sup>

"You are well aware that during the lapse of a thousand years changes take place in our mode of speech, and words that had much value then now seem to us astonishingly quaint and strange."

Chaucer said that. He was excusing himself to his readers for the language employed by the characters in the story he was telling of the ancient days of Troy. He was seemingly afraid that his readers might be critical of his diction or amused, perhaps, by the plain, unvarnished vocabulary of his poem. So he begged them not to impute the blame to him. The fault, he declared, lies in our changing speech. Once it would have been true that a given word, as used by a poet of bygone days, would find its way into the consciousness of a contemporary reader trailing clouds of accumulated glory, its connotations fresh and vibrant. But during the long passage of the years those undertones and overtones of association have been lost, to the impoverishment of the word itself. It now falls upon our ear without chime or vibration.

Time, inexorably, marches on. The language of Chaucer's own contemporaries—not the outworn speech of Troy but the new-minted currency of the fourteenth century—that language, in its turn, now strikes our twentieth-century ear as "wondrous odd and strange." So it follows that a poet of our own day who might undertake to tell us a story of Chaucer's time might find himself constrained to issue a similar warning to us. Such was the state of the language then, he might remind us, and you must not hold it against me if the words I give my characters to speak—words that were once so right and thrilling for them to use—now seem to us to lack the power and the glory they once possessed.

So, also, in the years to come some future poet will no doubt find our most pungent speech "nyce and straunge." For the wealth of lan-

<sup>1</sup> Given as a Chapel talk in Oberlin College on the occasion of the six-hundredth anniversary of Chaucer's birth.

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guage consists in the associations with which it is charged, the complex of meaningfulness it can sustain. Once those associations, and the temporary idealisms on which they are based, undergo the inevitable modifications of time, then the very words that sought to communicate their concentrated virtue—words that once possessed the power to make the pulse quicken and the heart throb in the breast—lose, perforce, much of their luster and their life.

And yet not everything is lost. Chaucer, with that quiet sagacity for which he is noted and with a touch of his faint, elusive irony goes on to say in this same connection:

And yet that is the very way those persons did speak and they fared as well in love as folk do now. Moreover, divers are the usages employed by those who would succeed in love in divers ages and in divers lands. So if it should chance that there be in this assembly any lover who is saying to himself as he follows this story, "That is not the way I should press my suit" or who marvels at our hero's speech and actions—I don't know whether there is any such person or not—it would not greatly surprise me.

The times change, and the customs of the country. Language loses much of the value intrusted to it by one age and then takes on the form and pressure of the new. But men and women in every land and every age, as Chaucer subtly implies, make shift to carry on the business of life and the affairs of love in the idiom of their own day. We need not commiserate Troilus and Cressida, he reminds us, because of the supposed poverty of their speech. They managed to get along with what they had. "Some of you may be inclined to think," he goes on, "that they would have been much better off, and would have found much more expressive language for their feelings, if they had had the inestimable privilege of our modern ways and particularly of our modern speech. I rather doubt it."

We may doubt it too. We may doubt it because now, in our turn, as with Chaucer before us, we are looking back from the perspective of hundreds of years on a body of poetry that still has the power to kindle the heart and quicken the pulse and bring honest laughter to our lips and to our eyes. For us to feel sorry for Chaucer because, forsooth, he was born too soon—born six hundred years before the sophistication of our modern tongue—is to waste our

pity and to indict ourselves for provincial impertinence. The language at his command amply served all his purposes. With his own shaping power he fashioned it into a medium as varied, as responsive, as even his wide-ranging regard of human life could employ.

And he used it with such consummate art as almost to nullify the very dread he feels in the passage with which I began—the dread that possibly these words of olden days might have lost something of their pristine virtue. For it is universally true that in the language of the great masters of poetry there is a quality that defies the encroachment of time, an inexhaustible vitality that puts on immortality. The language of lesser writers shrivels and dwindles into a husk. The words of an ordinary poem soon become emptied of their significance; so that a reader of a later age looks upon them with a qualified recognition of their intent. But with the greatest of our English authors it is not so. With Milton, with Shakespeare, with Chaucer, some magic, as of a never failing spring, reinvigorates from age to age the life-giving potency of their speech. The words of themselves may indeed sound strange to us, when we hear them; some of them may send us to the glossary or to the dictionary, to verify our not too certain understanding of their meaning; but, even so, they still possess that incantation power with which they first were blessed, they still communicate to us the implications, the sentiment, the quivering sensibility they were charged withal when first they were given their being.

Take, for example, these lines from "Lycidas":

Weep no more, woful Shepherds, weep no more,  
For Lycidas your sorrow is not dead,  
Sunk though he be beneath the wat'ry floor;  
So sinks the day-star in his ocean bed,  
And yet anon repairs his drooping head,  
And tricks his beams, and with new spangled ore  
Flames in the forehead of the morning sky.  
So Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high,  
Thro' the dear might of him that walk'd the waves,  
Where other groves, and other streams along,  
With nectar pure his oozy locks he laves,  
And hears the unexpressive nuptial song,  
In the blest kingdoms meek of joy and love.  
There entertain him all the saints above,

In solemn troops, and sweet societies,  
That sing, and singing in their glory move,  
And wipe the tears for ever from his eyes.

Such lines as these, surely, have forfeited nothing of their original beauty and virtue. The words are as moving now as ever they could have been.

Or take this familiar passage from the last act of *Hamlet*:

Horatio, what a wounded name,  
Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!  
If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,  
Absent thee from felicity awhile,  
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,  
To tell my story.

We may not fully comprehend what the word "felicity" meant to Hamlet—its philosophical content and its dying divination of truth—but we do know that such lines as these are still instinct with an undying glory.

And, finally, take this brief passage from Chaucer:

Naught may the woful spirit in myn herte  
Declare o point of all my sorwes smerte  
To yow, my lady, that I love most;  
But I biquethe the servyce of my goost  
To yow, aboven every creature,  
Syn that my lyf ne may no lenger dure.  
Allas, the wo! allas, the peynes stronge,  
That I for yow have suffred, and so longe!  
Allas, the deeth! allas, myn Emelye!  
A'las, departynge of our compaignye!  
Allas, myn hertes queene! allas, my wyf,  
Myn hertes lady, endere of my lyf!  
What is this world? what asketh men to have?  
Now with his love; now in his colde grave,  
Allone, withouten any compaignye!  
Farewel, my sweete foo, myn Emelye!  
And softe taak me in youre armes tweye,  
For love of God, and herkneth what I seye. . . .

Strange as are these sounds now to our ears and strange as are many of the words, is it not true that Chaucer is nonetheless one of that inner circle who confer upon the language they use a magic, imperishable spell?



But language, to be sure, is no more than a medium of expression. It is not an end in itself. However precious it may be, however rich and moving, it subserves a nobler purpose than merely to fall charmingly on the ear or to evoke faint echoes of old, unhappy, far-off things. It must prompt us to experience afresh the very passion that gave it birth. And only as that passion in the first instance was noble or grand or true, will the language it employs have final merit in our minds. Poetry is something more than a knack with words. Great poetry rests on a far more substantial foundation than speech alone. And a great poet is one whose conceptions have grandeur about them, whose insight and understanding are profound, whose view of the world enlarges our horizons. Language, even superlative language, is no more than the poetic raiment for this shining, splendid substance.

Let it be said at once that Chaucer does not command the imperial theme of the *Divine Comedy*. Nor can it properly be said of him, with even as much truth as it was said of Sophocles, that he saw life steadily and saw it whole. Milton's sublimity, Shakespeare's myriad-mindedness, are beyond his scope. But greatness nonetheless he possesses in his own right. He towers above mediocrity by virtue of the humane and thrilling love of life that quivers in his work and quickens every theme he touches. It would be a grateful task, therefore, to single out for comment and illustration a number of the attributes of that bounty of his that led one of the foremost of his admirers to exclaim: "Here is God's plenty." In truth, there is full measure in his work, pressed down and running over, and all of it vividly alive with humor, sympathy, unflagging zest. Chaucer might well have exclaimed, himself, anticipating Miranda:

O, wonder!

How many goodly creatures are there here!

How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world

That has such people in't!

But it must suffice, instead, to hark back to my first declaration. The language our poet uses, language obedient to his every shifting mood, responsive to his every glancing thought, finds its final warrant in the humane and civilized outlook on life which it reflects. It is the language of great poetry.

## INTERPRETATION OF TEXTS AND THE HISTORY OF IDEAS<sup>1</sup>

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I do not intend to argue here either that the history of ideas is a good thing in itself or that its pursuit belongs properly within the domain of professed students of literature. On neither point have I myself any doubt, and I am naturally pleased to notice that my enthusiasm for intellectual history is increasingly shared, as this year's program of the Association testifies, by scholars in all divisions of our field. In view of the circumstances the moment might well be one for self-congratulation, rather than for apologetic, among those whom Professor Lovejoy used to call "the friends of ideas." Complacency, however, is as fatal a weakness in scholarship as in warfare, and it will doubtless be more useful, now that the academic fortunes of the discipline seem well assured, to direct our attention to some of the difficulties in the way of its successful cultivation, particularly for those of us whose approach to the history of British and American thought has been conditioned, for the most part, by a previous training in the techniques of literary research. And it is the more important to do this because the problems which thus arise have been more than once cited, by unsympathetic critics within and without the field of literature, as a sufficient ground for skepticism concerning the enterprise itself.

Let me try to indicate what the main difficulties are and in what directions it seems possible, at present, to look for solutions of them. To begin with, the task of the historian of ideas, as of any historian, is twofold: he must be able, if his work is to be accurate in details, to interpret adequately the individual writings—the treatises, essays, dialogues, histories, speeches, didactic poems, etc.—which are the primary data of his study; and he must also be able, if his book is to be more than a collection of detached analyses, to discover

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principles of historical construction in terms of which significant relations among the writings may be revealed. Now whatever else may be expected of the professed student of literature, he must be supposed, by virtue of his philological training, to be an expert in the interpretation of texts—or at least to be concerned seriously with problems of interpretation and to care immensely lest anything destroy the meaning and integrity of his documents in their transition to the pages of his book. But unfortunately, at every step in the making of an intellectual history, ideas as well as words are involved; and nothing is more evident—since it is constantly being pointed out by our unfriendly critics—than that, as specialists in literary texts, we neither have nor can reasonably be expected to have anything like technical skill in all the varied subject matters—philosophy, theology, natural science, morality, politics, economics, psychology, etc.—which supply principles and arguments in even the more popular of the intellectual writings of any period. However ambitiously we may define our subject matter as students of literature, we cannot define it in such a way as to take in all branches of knowledge! But if that is the case, what warrant have we for thinking that we can properly interpret texts in which terms and doctrines belonging to one or another of these diverse disciplines are essential ingredients, or that, having interpreted them after some fashion, we can succeed in fitting them together in a significant frame of historical reference?

There are, I wish to suggest, at least two ways in which these difficulties, which loom so large in the minds of outsiders, may in some measure be avoided. The one is the way of the philologist or literary historian, the other the way (in a somewhat special sense) of the philosopher. Each of the two ways has its own distinctive techniques and criteria, and each of them, as we shall see, has characteristic limitations, the former on the side of ideas, the latter on the side of words.

In the first place, we may be content to approach intellectual history in the modest, though often exacting, capacity of editors of texts. For this kind of work, at least, the necessary means would seem to lie well within our traditional competence. It is true, no doubt, that even in such purely philological operations as the com-

parison of manuscripts or editions and the settling of variants, some degree of understanding of what the author meant by his argument is a preliminary requisite to deciding what he said; but though we should all agree that this is so, the issue seldom arises, happily, in an obvious enough form to cause us serious trouble. Nor is it necessary to be a technical philosopher in order to construct a useful historical commentary even on a text that raises philosophical issues or that depends for its schematism and content on a tradition of philosophical thought. For what is involved in the making of such a commentary is primarily a technique of comparison in which passages of the work we are editing are confronted with passages of earlier or contemporary works that exhibit an evident similarity in terms, distinctions, arguments, theories, organizations of topics, or expository devices; and the criteria for determining what similarities are significant can be reduced, more or less adequately, to the purely verbal standards by which we detect instances of plagiarism or establish material borrowings in works of a nonphilosophic type. The value of the results will of course be proportioned, in any particular case, not only to the learning and industry of the editor, but even more to his intellectual acuteness and sensitivity. Given these qualities, however, there can be little doubt that useful contributions to intellectual history are possible in this form from scholars whose training and orientation have been literary rather than philosophical in any recognized sense: witness, for the eighteenth century, such monuments of intelligent historical erudition as F. B. Kaye's commentary on the *Fable of the Bees* or the notes of Pierre Masson on the *Profession de foi* of Rousseau.

The great advantage of such inquiries is that they keep our attention closely focused on the text, or at least on those material parts and elements of the text which become significant from their likeness to material parts and elements of earlier texts. This advantage can be in good part conserved, and at the same time an approach made to a larger historical perspective than is afforded by any commentary, however learned, on an individual work, through the expedient of putting together, in a sequence determined by the lives of authors and their relations with other authors, descriptive *précis* of the contents of many writings on a given subject accompanied

by details, when these can be known, concerning the traditional sources of their ideas or patterns of exposition. An example of this mode of procedure—typical, in both its excellences and its limitations, of the philological approach to the history of ideas—is the recent work of Mr. J. W. H. Atkins on the development of literary criticism in antiquity. For those who are curious to know what Aristotle or Plato or Tacitus or Demetrius thought, in the sense at least of what their words seem to mean when their writings are paraphrased in modern English or rearranged under general topics supplied by Mr. Atkins or compared with writings on similar questions by contemporaries or predecessors, Mr. Atkins' book is highly instructive, and the instruction is uncontaminated, so far as one can see, by any one-sided eagerness either to pry into the philosophical traits of those of his critics who were philosophers or to embrace the whole evolution of ancient theories in some unifying philosophic scheme.

Such restraint, however, is not always easy or even possible. So long as we remain within the limits of a single subject matter, like criticism, the philological method is indeed adequate—or at least no acute sense of any inadequacy is likely to disturb our minds. The situation is very different when, because of the nature of our problem, we are forced to take account of documents involving diverse subject matters and hence diverse sorts of terms, principles, and arguments. And such a situation is bound to occur very often in the history of ideas—whether our topic is an author, like Hume, who touched on many varied fields of thought, or a concept, such as “beauty” or “natural law,” shared by several distinct disciplines, or a many-sided intellectual movement, such as the Scottish philosophy of “common sense.” For themes of this kind, it is obvious, a merely extrinsic type of historical organization, by authors and dates of works, will not do; we should have no history at all—or at best a congeries of histories—were we to content ourselves with giving separate accounts, unrelated by any common principle, of all the distinct classes of writings or doctrines we had found relevant to our subject. We must, therefore, if we wish to order our complex narrative significantly in terms of periods that are other than conventional distinctions in the calendar and of groupings and opposi-



tions among writers that are more than external, contrive somehow to discover a set of organizing ideas. And these, it is evident further, must be of such a sort as to presuppose no special competence in the many different sciences and disciplines to which our documents belong. For clearly we cannot be expected, as literary historians, to concern ourselves with what is most specific to the various kinds of works we have to discuss—the particularized problems they treat, the strict limitations imposed by their matter and method on the meanings of their technical expressions, the peculiarities of their schemes of organization. Our task, in short, is to discover some kind of unified substitute for the particular principles, in our documents, we do not possess—a substitute that will enable us to find significances in the words of our authors which, being deeper than anything arising merely from their individual intentions, will be at once more comprehensible to us and more conducive to orderly treatment, in terms of similarity and difference, in an illuminating historical whole. And the essential means to such a synthesis, it cannot be doubted, consists of terms for interpreting texts and disposing them with respect to one another which differ from the terms of any of the writers in our bibliography in being both larger in scope and simpler in meaning.

From an exegesis of words, then, in which, it must be confessed, ideas are somewhat slighted, we turn to a quest for general ideas; and fortunately the way to their discovery is not obscure. It was indeed precisely for the purpose of enabling philosophers to discourse intelligibly about questions more comprehensive than those involved in any specific subject matter that the dialectical method was invented by the Greeks; and what more natural than for historians of ideas, since their problem is the same, to seek to adapt that method to their own double task of interpretation and construction? What is needed is a species of "principles," distinguished by their capacity for being joined in propositions with any subject, by which we may be shown, amid all the doctrinal particularity of the writers treated in a history, clear and significant lines both of persistence and of change. And such "principles"—we may learn from the tradition of dialectic—can easily be found if only the historian will supply himself, not with the fixed premises of any par-

ticular science, but rather with pairs of contrary general terms, like "reason" and "feeling," "this-worldly" and "other-worldly," "tough-minded" and "tender-minded," "desire for unity of system" and "desire for conformity to facts," which, by virtue of their inclusion, as contraries, of all extremes of meaning, may be used broadly and flexibly to discriminate the conflicting attitudes or beliefs or tempers of writers regardless of the peculiar nature of the arguments wherein these traits are reflected. The more such principles we have, provided they are coherently related in our minds and provided we apply them consistently, and without disregard of philological standards, to the data, the better our construction will be. If the *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* is, as I believe, one of the few great classics of intellectual historiography in our language, the reason is to be found even more perhaps in the richness of Leslie Stephen's dialectical scheme, as set forth in his opening chapter, and in his admirably articulated use of it, than in the fact that he did pioneer research in a field which has since attracted so many less eminent workers. How poverty stricken, indeed, and lacking in philosophic finesse, seem in contrast some of our own efforts to compass all the variety of great minds like Hume or Burke or of great movements like seventeenth-century science or American political and religious thought within the narrow limits of single contrarieties such as naturalism and humanism or conservative and liberal!

Granted, however, some sensitivity and imagination on the part of the historian, the power of the method of contraries is undeniably great. It is, for one thing, the only sure device we have either for distinguishing periods in intellectual history or for explaining the true character of any period in relation to others before and after. The recipe is simple: we have but to set an age like the eighteenth century between two other ages—say the thirteenth century and the twentieth—each representing, in a somewhat idealized way, the extremes of a universal opposition, and we presently have, in some appropriate mixture of the contrary qualities, a clear formula for its "climate of opinion"; it is thus, for example, that an eminent historian, by ingenious manipulation of the contraries of theory and fact and of reason and faith, has recently shown us that the period of Hume, Diderot, Voltaire, and Gibbon was after all "nearer the

Middle Ages, less emancipated from the preconceptions of medieval Christian thought," than any of these thinkers quite realized or we have commonly supposed. Nor need we be unduly disturbed by the thought that Leslie Stephen, using somewhat different contraries and other terms of comparison, succeeded no less convincingly, many years ago, in locating the true essence of the same period in its nearness to the enlightenment of his own time; the virtue of the method lies after all in the flexibility of analogizing it permits; and who can legitimately complain of a procedure that has given us two such contrasting books about a single age as the *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* and *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*?

And there are other even more important advantages than this. Thus, since the principles at our disposal are always larger than those of any particular discipline that may be represented in a period, and since, because of the ambiguity of "thought," terms signifying distinctions in doctrine may easily be made equivalent to terms signifying distinctions of temper or psychological attitude, it is always possible, without at least obvious distortion of the texts, to disengage the fundamental ideas common to many contemporary forms of reflection, or, with Leslie Stephen, to emphasize differences of subject matter, as between philosophy, theology, ethics, politics, economics, and belles-lettres, at the same time that we trace the working, in all these fields, of the main contrarieties on which our history is founded. Or again, if our scheme of terms is sufficiently complex, we may, after establishing the unity in variety of an age, go far toward making clear the systematic variety in unity present among its writers by arranging them in pairs—Shaftesbury and Mandeville, Voltaire and Rousseau, Edwards and Franklin, Burke and Paine—according as they may be seen to represent oppositions of doctrine or temper or social prejudice proportioned to the general oppositions by means of which the characteristic problems of the period have been determined. Or finally, having used our principles for the purpose of constructing the intellectual outlook of an epoch or school in relation to what both preceded and followed and to the sociological conflicts of the time itself, we may employ them, no less powerfully, in the interpretation of individual texts; revealing,

in all the eminent minds of the period, as well as in the lesser intellects, those fundamental confusions or inconsistencies which seem to be inescapable in the history of ideas—at least when it is thus conceived; discovering, also, and by the same devices, the necessary incompleteness and blindness even of the greatest writers—a Hume, for example, writing on politics, or a Gibbon dealing with the causes of the spread of Christianity—when they face issues defined for them by the contraries of the historian.

But every method, however powerful, has its limitations; and there are probably few students of the history of ideas among those trained primarily in literature who, after their first enthusiasm for a technique that enables them to do so much on the basis of so little specialized knowledge, will not presently come to have doubts. These are likely to be inspired, in the first place, by considerations akin to those which led Horace, in a famous passage, to denounce mediocrity in poets as something never tolerated by gods, men, or booksellers. For the more we study the masterpieces of intellectual history written in the mode I have been describing, the more evident it becomes that their characteristic excellences, like those of the true poet, are not to be attained merely by industry or technical skill. It is not enough to collect materials exhaustively or even to interpret them in a scholarly way; many can do this, and the results, as we all know, are too often dull and unilluminating in the extreme—collections of quotations from many sources, forced into a semblance of unity by means of borrowed formulae ill understood: to be a Stephen or a Lovejoy something more is required, namely, inventiveness in securing principles and insight in applying them. But these are the gifts, denied to most of us, of the philosopher.

And there are also other reasons for being disturbed—two at any rate which are bound to seem important in direct proportion to our interest, as philologists, in preserving the meaning and integrity of texts. For it is clear, to begin with, that if we approach the writings of a period in terms of principles or ideas which, as the contraries of the historian, necessarily have their meaning defined in abstraction from the specific intentions of the authors to whom they are applied, the consequence is inevitably to take from our texts whatever individuality they have as systematic intellectual con-

structions serving the particular ends of their writers, and to reduce them to the status of exemplary instances, or manifestations, of attitudes and points of view more universal than anything literally signified by their words. So the *Essay on Man* can be treated as simply a reflection of the conflict, in the mind of the early eighteenth century, between the universality of natural religion and the particularity of Christianity; so Hume's essay on the standard of taste can be translated into the terms of a general opposition, in the same period, between static reason and dynamic feeling. It goes without saying that there is no possible objection, on theoretical grounds, to such a way of construing texts—after all, any individual object can, if we so choose, be taken as symbolic of something else. Nor is the difficulty merely that the same work, when it is introduced into histories by different scholars, yields different meanings and becomes emblematic in turn of different patterns of thought: this fact, too, when we remember the ambiguity of words, is neither surprising nor in itself any ground for complaint. Nor again is the point simply that many of those who have applied the dialectical method to the history of ideas have done so, all too often, in irresponsible disregard of the elementary rules of textual interpretation. For surely this is not a criticism that can be leveled against those masters of the genre to whom I have alluded; and yet it is perhaps chiefly in their writings—where the canons of scholarship are scrupulously observed—that one becomes most acutely aware of the problem. It is not that what is said in the history about a particular text cannot be verified, in some sense, in the text itself; the difficulty is rather that what is said cannot be verified, nor on the other hand refuted, by a direct reading of the text apart from the distinctive set of general principles—the historian's basic contraries and their equivalents—which are in the history the premises of all his interpretations. And this is as much as to say that in the meaning of verification we are accustomed to in our bibliographical and linguistic studies, verification, in any literal sense, of the hypotheses of a dialectical history is out of the question. We either perceive the emblematic relation established between the words of the text and the ideas of the historian or we do not; and though it is doubtless easier to perceive the relation when the ideas of the historian are expressed in words akin



to those of the text, not even in this case, we are forced to realize, is a fair judgment possible independently of the particular philosophic assumptions, regarding the import of the ideas, to which the history as a whole owes its meaning.

Even this, however, would probably leave our confidence unshaken were it not that in the process of adjusting our documents to the intellectual schematism of such a history, many of the traits which make the documents interesting to us as students of literature necessarily drop out of account. We are not likely to forget, when we read the classics of ideas for their own sake, that the power exerted by books like the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, or the *Preface to Shakespeare* is a function, not of particular arguments or pronouncements that can be detached from the rest of the text in exemplification of some general point of view, but rather of the total pattern of statements in the work which the author has invented in pursuance of his specific ends. Yet it is precisely this distinctive quality of great intellectual works—their integrity as logical structures, each with a more or less consistent rationale of its own—that inevitably disappears as soon as we treat them, or parts of them, merely as exemplary instances in a history of ideas. It is a disturbing thought that monographs and even full-length narratives have been written, on important intellectual developments, mainly from collections of *fiches*; and it is perhaps even more disturbing that when we read such masterpieces of construction in this mode as the *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, our minds tend to dwell more readily, and with keener satisfaction, on the skilfully organized words of the historian himself than on any of the words he quotes or paraphrases from even the greatest authors among his subjects.

We are back then where we started, with our original difficulties unsolved, or solved only in incomplete and somewhat less than satisfactory ways. I should not, however, wish to leave the impression that the problem of reconciling interpretation of texts and the history of ideas must be left indefinitely in the state in which it now seems to be. There is, after all, a third alternative which we, as students of literature, may explore: we may endeavor to acquire, in this field, a subject matter of our own—a subject matter which is

neither words as the philologist treats them nor yet ideas as these are conceived by the dialectical historian, but rather some combination of the two, to be identified, perhaps, with that art of intellectual debate which, a generation or so ago, though in a somewhat debased form, was still a vital element in our studies. But to show what I have in mind, and especially to make clear how from the analysis of argumentation a new kind of intellectual history might eventually be evolved, would require another essay much longer than this and doubtless even more abstract.

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## POETRY IN THE GOOD LIFE

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Teachers of literature have not escaped the confusion which marks the academic community today. In a world in which the physicists are trying to look at the world from outside the space-time sequence, in which philosophy has dwindled to symbolic logic, and psychology has replaced truth with objectivity, in which professors of economics look forward to the collapse of our economy with the fascinated and detached suspense of a spectator at a tragedy—it is no wonder that in such a world we teachers of literature, too, have got our wires crossed.

Most of us, professors and apprentices, are trying vainly to be objective historians, going dutifully through all the scientific motions but coming out, alas, without scientific results simply because our subject matter does not yield except in small and inconsequential ways to the scientific method. For we are working inescapably in the field of values, where we are constantly under the necessity to choose the good from the less good, to judge at the peril of our souls. If we are to be teachers of literature and not pseudo-scientists pouring the rank wind of the lecture system into the minds of youths, we must recognize this problem of values, this necessity to judge. We must hammer out some tough, yet flexible and sensitive, instruments by which we can make intelligently the evaluations we

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are now making blindly and helplessly because the only instrument we recognize now is the scientific instrument, the *novum organum*, which is finally helpless, for science by its very nature cannot make judgments concerning value.

This need is very great today, for the really terrifying speed of history, the acceleration of change, is making it impossible to impose traditional attitudes and evaluations upon undergraduate or graduate students or our younger teachers. The language of the English literature we teach is rapidly becoming a foreign language, and the culture it expresses is even more rapidly becoming an archaic culture. The time may soon be upon us when the only people who will read Swift's great prose will be the archeologists patiently searching for kitchen midden. Already the classical scholars are forsaking Plato and Homer to study inscriptions written by naughty boys on Pompeian walls and doorways simply because as pseudo-scientists they must toss one more doubtful brick onto the crazy pile of modern scholarship. We too are treating the great works of English literature with a fine objectivity not as a treasury of great experiences but as historical documents. It will serve us right if future scholars prize a mutilated copy of a Monkey-Ward catalogue recovered from some outhouse in the southern hills as throwing more light on our twentieth-century culture than Dos Passos, Hemingway, and Steinbeck combined.

The need for a renewed emphasis upon evaluation and critical judgment is even greater and more pressing because of the present chaos in the world of art and letters. The poems of Milton, Wordsworth, and Shelley, which seemed to put us in touch with the divine mind, are now replaced by the poems of Rimbaud, Auden, and Hart Crane, which put us in touch only with the Freudian depths of their own sick egos. Poetic styles are set by a cult of self-tormenting perverts. We are excited by the white-hot phrases which they vomit from their private and terrible hells, and we are too innocent in our objectivity, too unsure of what is good and what is bad, to reject anything.

As traditional culture is gradually smothered in this chaos, we need in the humanities less emphasis upon the scientific or historical approach and much more on normative judgments. If, then, we can-

not depend upon the authority of tradition, and if science cannot sustain our need for normative judgments, what course is open to us? As human beings we have still some resources. The inability to prove objectively does not throw us back upon irrational emotional convictions or on mere subjectivity. There are some basic assumptions we can make, not by an act of faith but pragmatically, as foundations for human living. We can count, for one thing, on the psychic similarity of all men: There are no deep gulfs of difference between men of different times or places or even of different racial heritage. For another, we can count on the basic similarity of experience through all times and places, despite the admitted differences of race, epoch, and climate. We can by generalizations and deductions form a set of notions about a normal man, a man in whom the complex nature of the human animal is fully and harmoniously developed. This set of notions will be at best somewhat general and somewhat distorted by our personal, spacial, and temporal limitations, but it will approximate the truth, humanly speaking.

From our understanding of the nature (that is, the potentialities) of normal men we can construct a theory of the good life which will be approximately valid for all men as they approach normality. Let us then honor that norm. We laugh at Russian peasants for regarding the village idiot as an oracle of God, yet we read with a kind of bewildered awe poems celebrating the acrid pleasures of homosexual passion. How is it that our bright young people take such pathetic corruption seriously? Is it partly our fault that they do so? Have we not taught them to take all poetry seriously—too seriously? Have we not misrepresented the place of poetry in the good life? I think we have.

As teachers of literature while pretending to maintain a professional objectivity and to avoid dogmas about values, we have imparted to our students the worst kind of dogma—the unconscious variety. We have shunned vain theorizing so resolutely that we have not asked ourselves what literature is and what its relation to the rest of life is. We have not gone on to discriminate among the many kinds of literature so that we may teach the different kinds differently, each with its proper emphasis and orientation.

As teachers of literature we suffer from an occupational disease brought on by our special environment. We not only tend to magnify the importance of literature in the total picture of the good life, so that a layman looks upon us with the same mingled awe and contempt that he entertains for a cellist in a symphony, but also, since our bookish lives are surrounded by novels, poems, and plays, we tend to experience life through literature. What is worse, we tend to seek in imaginative literature those intellectual satisfactions which we ought to seek in more exacting intellectual disciplines and those emotional and ethical satisfactions which it would be healthier for us to seek in the sphere of real action. It is dangerous for us and our students to depend for our economic analysis and political theory upon men whose chief distinction is that they can describe vividly and emote powerfully. Yet that is what many of us depend upon. And we depend for our knowledge of the workingman on the lurid sentimentality of the proletarian novelist. As teachers we are employing the dangerous magic of poetry to teach students religion—or irreligion, and morality—or immorality. We induce them to learn about love from Browning—there are better ways of learning about love—and we teach a beautiful lyric of Hardy's as if it were a springboard to impel the reader into a sea of spooky atheism. In short, we have got our wires crossed.

For our conception of the good life should not be formed by imaginative literature, but should include literature as a part, and not too large a part, of the good life. We should not judge life primarily by the ideas and attitudes we learn from literature and under the distorting influence of its vivid imagery and highly charged emotions; we should judge literature in terms of our experience of life and of our understanding of the good life. In that sense life, normatively viewed, is a criticism of literature rather than literature a criticism of life.

It is proper to recognize that the term "literature" covers a wide variety of phenomena and that we are considering here only one kind. Excluding the Montgomery-Ward catalogue as serving only the humblest practical purposes, and scientific writing as not being concerned with values, there are still two main divisions discernible. One is the vast body of writing which attempts to criticize life and



thereby to persuade men's minds and alter their lives: This ranges in English literature from More's *Utopia* to Carlyle "sputtering in his own grease" about things in general. As expressions of other men's ideas about the good life these have a right to a hearing in so far as they can hold our interest by meaning something to us today. When and if they cease to mean anything to us, let us pass them on to the archeologist. Such writings as these, whether we call them dogmatic prose or "literary philosophy" or, better still, a kind of written oratory, should be distinguished from another kind of literature which I should like to call poetry and which is not primarily an expression of opinion but something *made* for enjoyment—a novel, a play, or a poem.

Such a concept of imaginative literature is difficult to maintain in a period when poets, novelists, and dramatists regard themselves, and are regarded by us, as possessing *ex officio* authority in economics, politics (including the technique of revolution), psychology (including psychoanalysis), and religion. It is of the utmost importance that we educators should point out that there is a place for noncontroversial art and poetry in the good life—to point out that in a serious life there should be recreation of mind as well as of body, and that we get our best recreation when we are exercising our faculties within a framework which excludes the continuing strains and anxieties and responsibilities of our serious sustained endeavor. This kind of art and literature, then, is, in a sense, not serious; yet it is of the utmost seriousness that we should have such recreation. For innocent enjoyment is a necessary ingredient in the good life, and the capacity for innocent enjoyment is a criterion of the good man.

This innocent enjoyment may range from the most trivial and light-hearted lyric to great and complex works in which our full capacities of feeling and understanding are engaged. When talking about such great works—and we tend unfortunately to construct our theories of poetry exclusively on the basis of such great works—we tend to forget that the essential function of a work of art, a poem, a play, or a novel is to provide a framed experience, and that the intellectual and emotional and ethical experience are *within* the work of art, held there by the inner tension which gives the art work unity and totality of effect, and separated from life by the

obvious but often overlooked fact that the art experience is *not* life. Consequently a poem, a play, or a novel need not win our intellectual assent, our emotional response, or our ethical approval beyond its own context. So long as the poet maintains that context and that inner tension—so long as he avoids positive offense to our intellects, emotions, and ethos—so long as he does not fling us outside the frame, we have no just complaint against him.

An essential part of the poet's craftsmanship is the construction of such a frame, placing us in the experience he has made by vivid imagery, by compelling rhythm, by suspense. If he chooses to do more than offer us such a framed experience, if he chooses to engage our intellectual or emotional or ethical or social response beyond the limits of that experience, he may turn his novel into a thesis novel, his play into a social document, his poem into a religious prophecy, but if he does so, and in so far as he does so, he is doing more than as a poet he need do, and he is incurring a responsibility, intellectual, ethical, and social, greater than he need incur. It is a responsibility far graver than many writers who mistake their writing talent for prophetic powers seem to realize.

Since it is my contention that we professional *littérateurs* tend to take imaginative literature too seriously, tend to confuse it with science, philosophy, sociology, and religion, since I assert that we tend to seek in novels, plays, and poems the intellectual, emotional, and ethical satisfactions which we should seek in a more rounded experience, it is incumbent on me to elaborate briefly on these three aspects of the poetic experience.

First as to the intellectual satisfaction, the only test that we can rigorously apply is not *Is it true?* but *Does the poet get us to believe it?* If he places objects vividly enough before our imagination, we will believe what we see—at least while we are seeing it. If he can make his incident or event lively and interesting enough, we experience it—for the time being. If he can make skilful use of literary or dramatic conventions—however divergent from real life—we accept those as part of the tacit contract when we buy our ticket. If there is an improbability which he is afraid will interrupt the continuity of the experience, he has the opportunity, as the poet or maker, to select what he is to present to us and to conceal what-

ever would destroy belief. This is what Aristotle calls the "art of telling lies skilfully." The poet can rely upon what we want to believe: that vice is punished, that pride goes before a fall, that virtue is recognized and honored. If these things are so obvious, how is it that professors pawing over *Troilus and Cressida* with a magnifying glass can seriously regard it as a blemish that Ulysses quotes Aristotle? The Ulysses of the play is not the historical Ulysses if there was one. If the Ulysses of the play quotes Aristotle he must have known Aristotle—otherwise how could he quote him? I can recall that when Miss Millay's *Kings' Henchman* first appeared the Harvard English department condemned that charmingly sentimental trifle as an inaccurate picture of the domestic and military habits of the Anglo-Saxons. Teachers of the Romantic poets teach *Prometheus Unbound* to unprotected youths as a serious intellectual document instead of explaining Shelley's misty Neo-Platonism as a step to the enjoyment of a very great lyric poem. This misdirection of our efforts as teachers of poetry rests upon our failure to recognize with Whitehead that a poem need not be true; it need only be interesting.

However, to a normal man nothing is so profoundly interesting as the truth. Therefore, while we ought to flex our minds gracefully to those distortions of reality which are inevitable in the selecting and ordering of a poem, while we ought to accommodate our minds to views of life which we cannot seriously entertain, nevertheless an integral part of our pleasure in a poem, a play, or a novel is our intellectual satisfaction: how true this is, this is what people are like, that is the way life is. Only we have no right to make this truth the central criterion or the final end of poetry, for a poem with a minimum of truth may be a better poem than one in which truth is rampant. That is, the poem is not there for the truth it imparts, but the truth is there for the sake of our total experience of the poem and as a part of our total pleasure in the poem. The proof of this is that the person who enjoys a poem most is the one who has the least to learn from it. If the poem is a good poem, however slight, we enjoy it the hundredth time more than the first or tenth.

In the second place a poem need not be emotionally powerful or

give us an enhanced sense of life as Eastman would say. Here again we are trying to erect a theory of art and of poetry exclusively on the basis of great or powerful works, excluding without justification those slighter experiences which a cultivated person enjoys in the elegant and artificial lyrics of Horace. A man who is living a full life, putting himself into it, may find life itself quite rich and intense enough, and may properly turn to literature to thin down his experience, to ease off on the intensity, as a man plays solitaire or drives in the country to reduce his consciousness to very narrow limits. We have no right to build a theory of literature which excludes the detective story in favor of some pseudo-profundity by a misfit youth telling the world where to get off. A normal, healthy man does not find life dull. There are plenty of opportunities in the real world for a man to live richly and with profound emotion, and anyone who does not dodge the emotional shocks of real life is entitled to a gay poem, or escape fiction, or a light movie. It is part of our obligation as educators that we encourage and respect such literature as a part of the good life. When a man sniffs at Mozart's *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* and demands the kind of music that will rile his entrails, I suspect his moral character.

However, it is true that the richest and fullest enjoyment of a poem comes when our emotions are most profoundly engaged. But it is not enough for the poet to move us, to knock our hats off, for, when it comes to emotion, poetry can never deliver the kick that life itself can. The more profoundly the poet moves us, the more incumbent it is on him as a poet to complete the emotional cycle, to bring our emotions somehow to a state of balance or quiescence. For even great poetry is, at its best, emotionally as well as intellectually self-contained. The good man, when he enters a theater to see a tragedy, need not be carrying a load of mischief or of private grief; he probably has had a good dinner and feels exceptionally well or he would have slipped around the corner to a movie. It is up to the poet to arouse his emotions not about himself but about another fellow, Lear, or Macbeth, or Oedipus. At the end of the play there is nothing to worry about, nothing that he can do about it, and it is half-past eleven and he can't go out now and stamp out syphilis or start the revolution. And if the poet has done his job

well he won't feel impelled to. The play is not there to move us, but our emotional experience is part and only part of the total experience of the play. Nor is the play there as a substitute for the emotional experiences we have missed in life. The special and never to be sacrificed advantage of art is that the emotions may be ordered and completed within a frame.

I now come to the really shocking part of my argument and state that a poem need not be ethically sound. Of course if a poem offends our moral principles our pleasure is spoiled, but here again the poet may frame off the experience so that we do not respond as we should in real life. Poetic justice, for example, is not nearly so just as it is poetic. No responsible citizen would mete out the punishments as a jurymen which in a play he rejoices to see the villain suffer. Sentimentality is another example: The element of ludicrous fantasy in Saroyan's romantic plays prevents the putrid sentimentality from offending us. The movie as well as the book, *Of Mice and Men*, was to me a great ethical experience—greater love hath no man than that he should shoot the friend he loves to save him from indignity. Yet if one removes that experience from the frame in which Steinbeck carefully placed it, it becomes apparent at once that George had no right to go about the country with a ton of human dynamite loosely attached to him. In the movie a supremely good man, George in real life would be, however well intentioned, a bad man. In real life much might be said for Regan and Goneril. Obviously we have no right to pull these characters out of their plays. They are part of the texture of those plays and within the plays provide us with the ethical satisfaction which is an indispensable part of our great pleasure in them. To make the ethical meaning implicit in a play the end of drama, or the center of our theory about the drama, is to encourage the unfortunate tendency to look for ethical satisfaction in literature rather than life. The very people in the academic community who are so determined to take art seriously are usually the ones who refuse to take life seriously. They are enraged if you treat a proletarian novel lightly, but you can't get them to represent the teacher's union at the local trade council—you can't even get them to join the union; you can't get them to serve on the board of the local co-operative; you can't even get



them to join the co-op. Such people should have all imaginative literature taken away from them until they have ceased to use it as a drug.

The bad man wants poetry to drain off his emotional mess or to stimulate his jaded appetite or to give him a vicarious and cheap ethical satisfaction without the effort of being halfway decent in real life. We have trained too many of our young people to think of virtue in terms of the grand gestures and stunning magnanimity of the poetic drama. Such grandeur they will never meet in real life. For in real life it is seldom that one who is in a position of responsibility can meet an ethical problem with the single-hearted devotion to an ideal which is possible in literature, and if he did it is doubtful if he would accomplish much by it. In real life one cannot be 100 per cent right; one has, like Lincoln, to compromise and hang onto one's purpose, and nearly betray the cause in order to save it, and be accused of treachery and baseness and still hang on, and use imperfect means (since one can't do much good contemplating one's navel in Hollywood like Aldous Huxley), and do some wrong as men who are really good know they must do some wrong and do it calmly. If such a man manages to be 60 per cent right he gets an ethical satisfaction that the silly fellow with his nose in the book could neither experience in himself nor appreciate in another.

As teachers of literature let us not get our wires crossed. Poetry need not convey an ethical message. The proof is that the person who gets the best out of *Lear* or *Oedipus* is not the one who needs the moral elevation or who is morally changed by the experience; he is rather the one who has read Sophocles and Shakespeare many a time and has himself attained something like their moral level.

In sum, one does not read poetry in order to be made into a good man; one becomes a good man in order to enjoy poetry properly. The good man does not ask of a poem that it uplift him or teach him or stir his emotional depths. When poems do these things they do more than poems need do. And when poets become moralists, priests, or propagandists they incur more responsibility than, as poets, they need incur. It is a grave responsibility that rests on one who has so ordered his novel as to give the reader the impression that only the Communist party can and will save the oppressed worker or the negro. When the good man reads a poem or play or

novel which is not a complete experience in itself—which is not framed—he holds the author and himself responsible for the doctrine and the incitement to action. If the poet and the reader want to incur such responsibility, there is no legal or moral reason why they should not, but it is a grave responsibility. And, again, the poet as poet need not face it, for a poem, unlike a baseball game, should be framed. Within that frame the reader may move freely in the pattern set by the poet, imagining himself an oread exulting in the surf without really wanting to *be* an oread or even to meet one, if there were one. He may enjoy immensely one of the many good poems about cats and may continue to detest cats. He may enjoy Hemingway's latest novel but he does not get it confused with real life and real people, for he knows it is romance with a bitter-almond flavor. He may enjoy a play of Noel Coward's but he does not mistake wry sentimentality for sophistication. In short, the mature reader has an intellect and emotion and an ethos of his own and does not look to the poet to supply him with a philosophy of life.

Now, it is accidentally true that very young people, unlike mature persons, have much to learn—intellectually, emotionally, and ethically—when they read poetry. A selection of the best English poems introduces them to a range of thoughts and emotions and moral problems which are mostly new to them and in which they do not move with ease. These poems will widen their experience, enlarge their frame of reference, and increase their awareness of life. But it seems to me to be the teacher's function not to use these poems to teach the student philosophy but to teach the student such philosophy as will enable him to comprehend the poem. It is the teacher's responsibility not to teach moral lessons through poetry but to teach ethics so that the student will be able to appreciate the ethical content of the poem. In other words, the teaching of philosophy, psychology, and ethics should be subordinated to and oriented to the full comprehension and appreciation of the poem. It is not our function as teachers of poetry to improve the morals, politics, or religion of the young but to lead them by example and by persuasion to the pleasures of poetry—of good poetry, grave or gay. For the good life must have good pleasures, and the best man proposes to himself the best pleasures.

## THE PROFESSOR AND HIS CRITICS

GEORGE A. GULLETTE<sup>1</sup>

No thoughtful teacher of literature can afford to overlook the implications in the joint symposium on "Literature and the Professor" included in the fall issues of the *Kenyon Review* and the *Southern Review*. The ten contributors represent some of the ablest teachers, critics, and writers in America. They represent positions so divergent that the only ascertainable base of agreement is the conviction that there is plenty wrong with the professor of literature and his teaching.

I think it is possible to acquiesce in this assumption and still feel dissatisfied with the contribution which the symposium makes toward a realistic solution of the professor's problems. Primarily I object to what seems to me to be a careless confusion of the critical and pedagogical aspects of the professor's work. The professor's job is inordinately multifaceted, and I must protest against the oversimplification of which most of the contributors to the symposium appear to be guilty. I suggest that the professor's critics can render him service—and this, I assume, is what they mean to do—only if they begin with a humble recognition of the simple truth that they are dealing with an unbelievably complex set of conditions, and that no suggestions can possibly be of value to the professor unless it is quite clear which segment of the complex the critic has in mind. I find myself, for example, greatly baffled and annoyed by the attacks upon the historical method, which are so popular now, because I am never sure what kind of course or what kind of student the critic is thinking of. Let me illustrate briefly.

In discussing the functions of literature courses, it is quite probable that a distinction must be drawn between instruction upon the graduate and upon the undergraduate levels. It is conceivable that the historical method may be valuable on one and not on the other. At any rate, a generalization about the usefulness of the historical

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method must be tested by separate application to each of these categories. But within these classifications there are subdivisions which only the most casual layman dare ignore. On the undergraduate level, for example, there are at least three major kinds of courses to be distinguished: (1) the course for the student who does not like and does not want literature courses (he will often be required to take at least one); (2) the course for the student who is interested in literature as a part of his general education but who does not propose to concentrate in it; (3) the course for the student who specializes in literature. I have an uncomfortable feeling that many of the professor's critics have in mind only the last group, yet the other two clearly outnumber it and very often occupy a major portion of the professor's time.

There are many other subdivisions which a careful analysis would recognize. I suggest only a few of the more obvious ones. Among those who major in English are students who do so because they like literature and want to learn as much as possible about it, but who have no intention of utilizing that knowledge for any purpose other than their private enjoyment. There are others who are preparing to teach English in the public schools. There are others who are preparing to go on to graduate school with the aim of becoming scholars, or college teachers, or both. There are others who are interested in writing, professionally, though these constitute a very small minority. I submit that a discussion of the aims or methods of courses in literature is intelligible only when the kind of student to be dealt with is clearly visualized. I deny that there is a generalization which will fit them all; or, more accurately, I deny that there is a useful generalization which will fit them all.

If it is not too painful, then, for the critics of the professor, I should like to illustrate the only method which seems to me feasible for discussing the professor's difficulties: I invite attention to a single, specific problem, very homely, very real.

Here is a class of forty students, gathered together under average college conditions to do something connected with literature. It is a required course, the students are freshmen and sophomores, of both sexes, ranging in age from seventeen to twenty. We know in advance that no more than five out of the forty will ever again in their

lives expose themselves to the formal teaching of literature. Some fifteen will never finish college but will drop out to become filling-station operators, truck drivers, semiskilled laborers in factories, or perhaps small retail merchants. Of the remainder, approximately fifteen will eventually establish themselves in modest positions in business as clerks, pharmacists, secretaries, mechanics, accountants, foremen, or even general managers. Of the ten unaccounted for, six or seven will become teachers of various subjects in grade and high schools, and the rest may become professionals—lawyers, scientists, dentists, doctors, professors, or writers.

These students will have graduated from respectable high schools and will have read about half of what their high-school teachers of literature think they have read. For practical purposes it will be safe to assume that they have read no poetry except the *Idylls of the King*, no drama except *Julius Caesar*, no novel except *Ivanhoe*. In any real sense, they have done no reading at all. You may think that, of course, they read the comic strips in the daily papers and, perhaps, the sports pages too; you will be 50 per cent wrong. Only about half of them do even that much reading; but do not despair—there is a literate minority, small but fervid, which pores religiously over the *Reader's Digest*.

These students, then, sit before you, a little sullen, most of them, because this is a required course. They dare you to interest them in literature. You will have them before you two hours each week for a whole year. What will you do with them? How will you begin, where will you end? What goal can you formulate for yourself—what goal, that is, which has any slight possibility of realization? If the professor's critics will discuss with him this kind of problem, he will know what they are talking about, and he will listen avidly, for he is himself a little bewildered.

First of all, to ask that the conditions be altered is to evade the issue. This is the kind of class the professor *does* have to deal with. Whether it is the kind of class he *should* have to deal with is part of a large educational question which the professor is interested in but which is not a part of his teaching problem except in so far as he makes the mistake of teaching this class as though it were dif-



ferently constituted, as though it were molded closer to his heart's desire. Let us, regretfully but firmly, turn from the temptation to discuss ways of changing the professor's problem and face the problem as it really exists. (I do not mean to imply that this is the only kind of class the professor must deal with, but it is one kind, an important kind, and I am insisting that his problems must be considered one at a time rather than in the lump as is too often the practice of his critics.)

What, then, shall we do with these forty average college students who are at our mercy for a year? The methods we use may well wait upon the formulation of a statement of purpose; we can better tell how when we know what. Let me suggest, tentatively, that we should teach them to read. I know of no one who pretends that the average college freshman or sophomore can already read, and one of the prerequisites for any kind of study of literature must surely be the ability to read. Mr. Wright Thomas proposes such a goal in his article in the *Southern Review*.

Objection may be made, however, that this is not the best course in which to teach a college student to read. The composition, or rhetoric, course frequently attempts this task; and even where that is not the case, it may be argued that the student can better be taught to read in a course which he takes voluntarily, a course in which he has some genuine interest. This seems to me to be valid. The responsibility for teaching students to read surely does not rest solely upon the shoulders of the teacher of literature but rests equally upon the shoulders of all his colleagues. The professor of literature will be concerned to improve the reading abilities of his students, but this can scarcely be either his ultimate or his major aim. The answer to our question lies somewhere beyond the acquisition of reading skills; it is more likely to be found by asking: To what end do we desire a student to improve his reading?

Let us try again and say that the function of the course we are to teach is to enrich, by contact with the best that has been thought and said in the world, the minds and spirits of our forty students. I suggest this because something like it is perhaps the most common justification offered for the teaching of the kind of course we are

dealing with. No one of the contributors to the symposium has made quite so loose a statement, but a similar premise is implicit in much of what they say.

The objections to this formulation are manifest. In so far as I am able to understand it, I approve. But I confess I don't really understand much of it. The best that has been thought and said in the world is no longer the exclusive property of the teacher of literature. Much of the reading in that category is to be found in the courses in philosophy, the sciences, history, and economics. Furthermore, I do not know exactly what "enrich" means—does it mean something different from the learning of a skill, and, if so, how different? Is there a valid distinction to be drawn between mind and spirit, and, if so, what is it? And, most crucial of all, precisely what kind of contact with the best that has been thought and said in the world will be effective in this process of enrichment? Surely mere exposure, under the various forms of duress available to the professor, of minds in the state of preparation discoverable in our forty hypothetical students will not guarantee results which are either predictable or desirable. I am afraid that this kind of statement of purpose won't do—nor will others like it which take refuge behind terms like beauty, or aesthetic comprehension, or expansion of horizons.

Perhaps it is clear by now that our problem—what to do with these forty students—has two faces which need to be considered separately. On the one hand, we have certain aims to formulate in common with our colleagues; we have certain general educational objectives which are not peculiar to the study of literature. On the other hand, there must be some things we want to accomplish which can be accomplished with no other subject matter. This is a distinction which is simple enough, but I do not often see it made. It has been suggested, for example, that perhaps the aim of the study of literature should be the acquisition of a critical and disinterested mind. Any study of literature which did not have some such goal in mind would seem to me to be poor indeed, but I should be compelled to the same judgment of any other course in the college curriculum. The encouragement and training of critical minds is a responsibility we share with all serious educators and does not seem to

me wholly to satisfy the demands for a specific goal for a specific course in literature. In fact, if we were to analyze carefully the forty students in front of us and then attempt, with full honesty, to determine what as teachers we could do to assist them in the acquisition of critical minds, I am not sure that literature, as such, would enter into our calculations at all.

In order to arrive at a statement of the educational objectives which the professor of literature holds in common with all of his colleagues, we should canvass the whole field of sociological and economic and intellectual problems connected with the function of higher education in our civilization. I believe this to be quite necessary, but it is beyond the pretensions of this paper. I hope here only to indicate how much more complex the professor's problem is than most of his critics recognize. I trust, therefore, that I shall not seem to be taking my obligations too lightly if I decline to enter into those endless discussions of the question, What shall we educate for? which are, I take it, merely subdivisions of the real question, Whither mankind? Let us say, merely, that as we face our forty students, we are conscious of whatever general obligations our times place upon all serious educators, and that these obligations as we understand them may be stated in their most highly concentrated form by saying that we propose to encourage critical and disinterested thinking.

Having gone this far, the problem of justifying to these forty students the study of literature instead of or in addition to all other studies remains. Why literature? As I see it, there are two, and only two, possible modes of justification. We must either assume, with full responsibility, the frankly skeptical position, or we must make a declaration of faith. On the one hand, I may say to this class, "I do not know the answers to any of the ultimate problems of the universe. I do not know whence we come, why we are here, or where we are going. I know only that here and now I like literature, just as you like football or chocolate pudding. I cannot intellectually justify my fondness—I can only attempt to communicate it to you without any rationale. I hope that you, too, will like literature, because I somehow want you to like the same things that I like, though why, I cannot tell."

Such a position is, I believe, impregnable. The professor of literature who holds it is on metaphysically and aesthetically sound ground. And I am sure that many professors of literature do hold such a position and do, in effect, make such declarations to their classes. The validity of what they say is unimpeachable; but its utility is open to some question. It is my observation that this technique serves the professor well in literature classes composed of students who like literature before they come to his class, and who voluntarily elect such courses because they do like it. But I am concerned still with our forty unregenerate students, without background, without much interest in reading of any kind. I do not know what to answer to them when they tell me that they are content to stick with their football and their chocolate pudding.

The only alternative is a declaration of faith. Since the professor of literature is on the defensive, these are a dime a dozen. The professor is constantly making them, to his classes, to his colleagues, to his public. The ground has been so thoroughly worked that I suspect it would be impossible to evolve an entirely fresh one. I know at least that it is impossible to review them all here. In kind, they relate themselves to every emotional and intellectual position available to man—religious, economic, social, political, psychological, and aesthetic. For example, Professor Babbitt used to justify the study of literature upon what were essentially moralistic grounds. If you can accept his premises (or his declaration of faith) concerning the nature of man and his destiny, you will find his uses of literature invaluable. If you can accept the declarations of faith of men like Sidney, Dryden, Wordsworth, Shelley, Arnold, or Pater, you will find *their* uses of literature invaluable. To become more immediate, if you can accept the declarations of faith of the Marxists, or the Fascists, or the Freudians, the regionalists, the rationalists, or the pragmatists, you can justify the study of literature in terms of *their* premises.

It is clear enough that modern criticism is a battleground upon which these and other faiths are being tested. If the professor is bewildered by the uncertainties of the conflict, so are the critics. But the professor has an advantage over the critics which I should like to see him capitalize upon a little more realistically than he has

seemed to. The key to his advantage is the class of forty yawning freshmen and sophomores who still await his blandishments. If he will study them a little more closely, he will discover that they possess a practical solution to his difficulty. They cannot help the critic, but they can help the professor, because the critical and pedagogical problems are not the same. The critical problems may well be of great intellectual and personal significance to the professor himself, but they are related only indirectly to his teaching problems.

I am afraid that most of us spend a great deal too much time trying to justify the teaching of literature to ourselves, or to our colleagues, or to our critics, or to our gods—but not nearly enough time in trying to justify it to our students in language, or in ways, that will be valuable to them. The professor may justify to himself his presence before a literature class in any way he pleases. He may, with the aid of the critics, fight out a declaration of faith for himself, or he may assume the skeptical position which I have already mentioned, or he may simply say that the pay is good and the hours are short. The solution which he ultimately accepts for himself, it seems to me, has only the most tenuous import for his class.

If the professor attempts to sell to his class the particular brand of critical justification which seems to him at the moment most satisfying, he can do so only with reference to philosophic and literary speculations which are congenial to him. They may be entirely unprofitable for his students. If, on the contrary, he dedicates himself to discovering, with the aid of his class, a declaration concerning the functions of literary studies *for them*, he will find that his problem has a pragmatic solution, though divorced, perhaps, from any ultimate critical criteria. In brief, the professor, if he is to fulfil any of his functions, must deal with literature *and* the student. My impression is that for many of the professor's critics the second half of this partnership is only the vaguest kind of abstraction.

Many modest attempts to evolve a functional justification for literature courses are being made in American colleges now. They are not very dramatic, and they have received, fortunately, little publicity. They represent, on their negative side, a protest against the assumptions which underlie the conventional introductory literature courses. These courses have been designed to acquaint the



student with the tradition of "school" literature by means of a survey, conducted chronologically, by literary types, or by the "great authors" method. The assumption that this body of materials is that best suited to the literary needs of college freshmen and sophomores is being challenged. On their positive side, these attempts are characterized by a willingness to investigate what lies behind the blank faces confronting the professorial lecturer and by a frank recognition that the majority of students who are subjected to such courses have no longer any real need—and surely little respect—for the social prestige which has for so long been the implicit justification for acquaintance with a common body of literary materials.

To replace the conventional materials, a good bit of experimental work is being done in the use of contemporary folk literature, folk songs, and ballads as an introduction to poetry; the use of the movies and radio plays as an introduction to the drama; the use of modern magazine materials as an introduction to the novel. Some of this work is very clumsy and naïve indeed, and the professor needs all the help which his critics can offer him. With their wide knowledge of literature outside the academic ken these critics can, if they will, contribute invaluablely to his experiments. They can help, too, in the inevitable quarrel with the traditionalists, which such experimentation entails—unless, of course, the critics are themselves traditionalists. But at least those among the critics who understand that a narrowing audience for literature is the surest sign of decadence ought to come gladly to his aid.

This experimental work has great significance for our larger discussion, because the declaration of faith which I have said is necessary to justify the teaching of literature to our class of forty here grows out of the actual literary experience of these students. They become aware, for perhaps the first time in their lives, of those needs within themselves which literature alone can satisfy. They begin to formulate for themselves simple statements about the function of literature. These statements do not sound like much when compared to the glowing generalities the professor could himself manufacture: they are likely to be such things as, "I never thought much of poetry before, but I guess some of it is OK." This, however, will not dismay those who recall that John R. Tunis' report on the Har-

vard class of 1911 indicated that twenty-five years after graduation the most popular reading was the *Saturday Evening Post*. To raise, if only slightly, the level of casual reading among college students may not be an entirely ignoble purpose.

On the basis of the kind of experience I have been describing, the professor can face his class of forty freshmen and sophomores and present a goal which will not only be meaningful to them but will have every reasonable likelihood of realization. I hesitate to phrase its exact nature, because it will inevitably vary as institutions and students vary. But he will, whatever the circumstances, be able to justify the reading and the work which is required on the ground that the reading and the work grow out of the genuine needs of his students; and that the nature of these needs has been arrived at inductively, without reference to a predetermined body of traditional materials which the professor has accepted while his eye was not upon the class.

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#### A PHILOSOPHY FOR REQUIRED FRESHMAN ENGLISH<sup>1</sup>

THEODORE MORRISON<sup>2</sup>

I do not believe that the need for some kind of required freshman English is likely to be questioned. What is much more open to question is the success that any form of required freshman English can hope to meet. We shall be wise, I think, if we try to conceive as clearly as we can just what is the nature of the need in virtue of which thousands of students of all kinds—from prospective teachers and writers to prospective engineers, doctors, merchants, and clerks—are every year marshaled into freshman courses under prescription by the colleges. Our mode of attack and our hope of success will depend on how well we are able to understand the need we are trying to meet.

Different teachers would advance different grounds for believing that freshman English is a perpetual necessity. Some would probably conceive of their task as fundamentally a police duty—the

<sup>1</sup> Delivered at a section meeting of the College English Association at Boston, December 28, 1940.

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endless patrol of the punctuation beat. It is certainly easy to demonstrate that the English written on examinations and even in senior honors theses in the English department is often disgracefully shoddy in the fundamentals of language, abusing everything from spelling to grammar, syntax, and proper usage. But police duty is a shallow conception of the task, and when composition teaching restricts itself to correcting external errors of form, it does not, according to my observation, meet with success. It does not even open the important questions or touch the student's difficulties on the quick.

Some teachers probably conceive of required freshman English as an introduction to literature and literary history. My own earnest conviction is that the need for a literary vaccination that will really take is widespread and acute. There is an actual and pressing danger that the literary tradition which constitutes our mental inheritance will be frittered away either in downright ignorance or in mere random exposure to hit-or-miss reading which does not reach behind the powerful stimulations of the present and the very recent past. Many of us are afraid that the breach in tradition has already occurred and worked devastating effects. And yet I do not believe that exposure to the literary tradition, with all its importance, is quite the rock-bottom need by which required freshman English is to be vindicated. A deeper and deadlier necessity lies heavy on our freshman students—a need that for the great majority of them must underlie and precede any really profitable study of literary history. I do not hold unreservedly with the view that students “write worse and worse.” I think there is plenty of ground for believing that they read “worse and worse.” The inevitable consequence of this is that they think “worse and worse.” The best students of today write with more imagination and with more honesty in trying to cope with experience than the students of my college generation. The students of ordinary and less ability are singularly ill-fitted to use language as an instrument for either thinking, reading, or writing. We recently gave an examination to freshmen at Harvard based upon two paragraphs from an opinion of Justice Holmes in a case involving freedom of speech. Justice Holmes said at one point that to tolerate freedom of speech seems to

indicate that you think speech of no account, or, as he put it, "impotent." He gave an example of impotent speech—a man's assertion that he had succeeded in squaring the circle. From the answers to the examination it appeared that a surprising number of students had no idea at all of what squaring the circle means. If they had met this idea in the context of mathematics, they were unable to deal with it in the context of reading, unable to see its relation to Justice Holmes's point about free speech. This suggests to me that we cannot revive the literary tradition in any real sense by requiring all sorts of freshmen to study literary history. The real need on which required freshman English rests is the need for training in language as an instrument of reading, thinking, and writing. This is an immense task. It is a task of education in general, not of any one department, not of an English department considered as a body of scholars devoted to a particular and specialized field of learning. This conception of required freshman English means that the weight of the course should fall on composition, on writing as the material evidence of the student's command of language for his primary threefold purpose. The writing should be expository, not what is called or miscalled "creative." Expository writing, if it is construed widely enough, will give all possible opportunity for imagination, taste, and feeling. A student should explain, argue, summarize, analyze, criticize, report scenes, describe characters, try to create the impression and atmosphere of a home town, of the life of the people he knows. He should read books, present their content accurately, compare them with other books, distinguish between different views, and advance his own opinions. He should, in short, do as much as he can of the work of an intelligent reflective mind. He should know, feel, and judge, and he should give orderly expression to the upshot of his knowledge, his feeling, his judgment.

This conception of required freshman English is inclusive. It gives equal rights both to the student of some literary taste and ability, and to the prospective engineer, chemist, or accountant. It gives equal rights both to literature and to other kinds of reading in the classroom. The prospective engineer is going to live in a world of literary expression. He cannot intelligently digest the political, religious, and economic expressions by which he will be pelted if his

training in language has not enabled him to recognize a metaphor when he sees it, and to use it properly as an instrument of understanding. He cannot go to the theater intelligently or read the novels of Hemingway and Steinbeck unless he has learned to cope with the expression of mind in the language of imagination. The prospective teacher or graduate student of literature, on the other hand, is going to be a very incomplete citizen of the world and a disaster to coming generations in the classroom if his acquaintance with language is limited to the argot of professional scholarship and literary history, or if he rears a wall around his garden and dwells comfortably in the single realm of the aesthetic. Required freshman English is a wide and inclusive task. Nothing proper to language as an instrument of reading, thinking, and writing is foreign to it.

This view of the required freshman course raises an administrative question. Looked at in this way required freshman English is not a departmental course. It does not correspond with any one field of learning or clearly marked area of scholarship. It is a common trust of the faculty as a whole. It will naturally be taught by teachers of English, but it may well be administered by a special committee set up to give explicit sanction to its particular functions. Such an arrangement frees those who teach the course to pursue the purposes I have described by the methods and with the materials that trial and error proves useful for their specific task. It enables the head of the course to judge the members of his staff by standards appropriate to a particular educational job and allows them to conduct their work without at the same time being judged by the special demands of professional departmental scholarship. The administrative question is therefore an educational question and therefore important.

When the aim of the freshman course has been conceived and some appropriate mechanism arranged for it, the task of carrying it into the trenches and making it work under fire remains. The educational task of the freshman English course consists at present in trying to do during the first year of college what has often been done not at all, or done amiss, in secondary education. I do not mean to say that if secondary education were consistently good,



the freshman English course could be dispensed with. It would still remain our job to carry on at college level what had been well begun before. But at present we find large numbers of students unable to read, ill-prepared to think (at least in so far as thinking requires language as its tool), and hence helpless to write. The educational task of freshman English consists, therefore, in trying to enable the students to interpret reading of various kinds and in trying to lead them to make gains in writing proportional to their development in thinking and understanding. The whole task cannot be approached by police methods at the level of grammar and rhetoric. It is a psychological task. It must depend upon the instructor's ability to understand the individual student as fully as he can; it must provide for individual conferences frequent enough to make this understanding possible.

I should like to give an illustration of the fine art of interpreting reading with a freshman class. An instructor recently described to me in a shop-talk session how he attempted to win the understanding of a freshman class for a short story by Katherine Anne Porter. It is a story called "Magic," gruesome and shocking in the extreme. A more difficult piece to present to an ordinary assemblage of freshmen I can hardly imagine. It concerns the attempt of a prostitute to escape from her house of employment, where she had received particularly brutal treatment, and her return. The proprietor of the house uses an especially loathsome magic charm as a means of bringing her back. The class was uneasy in the presence of this story and highly skeptical of its merits, as I think a freshman class ought to be. Their complaint at first took the curious form that nothing happens in the story. Probably if they could have made their real resentment of it articulate, they would have given very different reasons, but the charge that nothing happened furnished the instructor with as good a point of departure as any. He asked them to characterize the situation and the conduct described in the story. The class agreed that it was horrible. He then asked them for explanations of the girl's motive in returning. Two kinds of explanation were obviously possible: a supernatural explanation would be that the magic charm worked; a naturalistic explanation would be that the girl returned because no opportunity to grasp at another

kind of life was possible to her, or because she had been corrupted by long servitude. The instructor wrote these two categories on the board and asked which was the more horrible. This led to lively discussion and a majority view that the natural-social explanation was more horrible than the supernatural explanation. The instructor was then ready to return to the original question whether anything of importance had happened in the story. It would seem to me that a prospective scientist or insurance salesman participating in this discussion would learn something about the logic of human emotions, about the concept of moral causation, and how they may be expressed in the imaginative language of literature. It would seem to me that a student of literary inclination would learn an apparatus of thinking that would considerably sharpen his powers of analysis and that might carry over into his study of non-aesthetic material. It would seem to me that a student of any sort might be expected ultimately to profit in his own use of language by such an interpretation of a piece of reading.

To turn from reading to writing, I should like to say that the primary demand that freshman composition ought to lay on the student is the demand for content, the demand that he have something to say and that he say it with due regard for consistent thinking, for the primary intellectual categories by which order and intelligibility are maintained in the world. It is in this intellectual part of writing that our entering students seem to me most conspicuously deficient. I believe in grammar and syntax, and I believe that they ought to be taught in grammar school and secondary school, but they cannot be taught as mere formalities of usage. They must be taught in relation to content. I recently visited the English department of a large suburban high school and read some twenty-five or thirty themes which had been produced there. In range of vocabulary, in standard of usage, in the amount of writing which the students were able to set down, these themes would, I think, have satisfied any reasonable critic. What struck me about them was the lack of intellectual foundation. One lad produced a sympathetic and lively narrative of the travels of Père Marquette, based on his reading of Agnes Repplier's biography; but the only order he seemed able to follow was the simple order of chronology.

Wherever a question of cause and effect arose, the category of causation was simply absent from his mind. I could only conclude that he was being taught English without being taught even rudimentary logic, without any attempt to bring to his consciousness the fundamental points of order and relation involved in a narrative. The case was even worse when I looked over other book reports in which the hapless students had parroted for their teacher's benefit the cliché terms of reviewers' cant and publishers' blurb. If anything, the situation was still worse when I looked at the descriptions of days on the beach in rhetoric so florid and unreal that one might have expected even the society-page reporter of a spring wedding to blench at them. The assignment usually indicated that the student had been asked to achieve vividness at all costs!

When we see the writing apparently sometimes encouraged in secondary school, we can understand why the student comes to college with a blank mind, a rooted distrust of imagination, and a conception of language in terms of schoolmarm's English totally unrelated to his own voice, to the natural spoken vocabulary of his own times and his own society, or to any thoughts at which he might, with a little effort, arrive. These conditions make it necessary for us to begin at the bottom with the student's very conception of what the act of writing is. We must first of all demand that he have something to say; we must teach him how to put himself in possession of content. We must help him find content in his own experience, in his hobbies, in his home town and the relation of his family to it, and in the other courses he is studying. We must teach him that the written word is an outgrowth of the spoken word and that what he says on paper is an extension of his voice. These necessities are fundamental and they determine that the art of theme reading is not the correction of errors, but the psychological appraisal of a human individual. An instructor not long ago described to me the situation of a student with whom he was having particular difficulty. He was at first favorably impressed by this boy's written papers. They were in a more colloquial style than students ordinarily use in an English class. They had a certain agreeable ease and naturalness. The instructor later began to notice an extreme limitation of vocabulary and emptiness of con-

tent, somewhat concealed by the specious ease of manner. He taxed the student with these defects and began to learn that the ease of manner was a kind of protective mechanism at which the student had half-consciously arrived. It turned out that reading was a difficult and painful operation for this boy, and it further turned out that his difficulty in reading was related to trouble with his eyes. Special physical difficulties, it is true, happened to be important in this case; they might have been detected earlier and by other means than an analysis of the student's English papers. But I give the instructor's diagnosis as an example of the art of theme reading considerably above the level of the police-work correction of errors. At any rate, I am sure that insistence on content is one of the primary duties of the freshman English course in composition, and that not all the content should be of a literary sort. Only when we set the students to thinking and reading on a variety of topics that really involve the fundamental categories of mental order can we begin to attack the real problems of the successful use of language.

If we are to demand as a first and greatest exaction of freshmen that they shall have something to say, some content to put down on paper, we shall have to undertake ourselves the task of supplying a considerable part of the content, or at least the intellectual means of arriving at it. This is a difficult and important part of the teaching of freshman English. It raises the question whether there is a definite appropriate content for the required course. I am afraid that in a certain sense at least there is not. At any rate we cannot conceive of the appropriate content in terms of any one professional field of learning. We are not engaged in teaching a branch of erudition, but in eliciting and intensifying certain general capacities of mind equally useful in every study and every intelligent activity. In order to do this we concern ourselves not with the mastery of any given body of facts or of any given group of texts, but with the mastery of an instrument—language, which is indispensable in dealing with any body of facts or group of texts. I think that English and American literature should certainly both be represented in the reading expected of freshmen. I think that if the course is limited to the history of either literature as such, to any kind of "survey," it excludes the natural tastes and capacities of the majority of the

freshmen, and what is more important, fails to open up at all the central problems with which the course should be concerned. I distrust profoundly the attempt to turn the freshman course into a conducted tour of the development of the ideas of Western civilization or of the supposed origins of contemporary thought or contemporary literature. If anyone is prepared for thinking at such levels of generality, certainly the freshman is not. Generalizations are the freshman's inveterate substitute for thinking. He comes to college prepared to believe that generalities are important and that the concrete and the particular are trivial. One of the first and most difficult tasks is to teach him the fine art of noticing particular facts, particular expressions on people's faces, particular words, and to lead him to see, in these humble particulars, ranges of implication which have some actuality because they are related to tangible and observable items of experience. The pretentious textbooks which present a few great documents from literary and intellectual history, interlarded with editorial introductions and essays, seem to me dangerous and destructive in the extreme. They promote an allegiance to highly abstract verbal formulas toward which the student can only become completely skeptical if he makes any honest intellectual progress at all. The reading which we give the freshmen should be various in the sense that it should call on the various capacities of mind and that it should direct attention to various problems. But the abstract for the freshman is not various, it is merely deceptive and empty.

The freshman should certainly be led to understand the intellectual process by which an abstraction or generalization arises from particulars. The relation of the general to the concrete is simply one of those all-important categories of order like the category of causation, or of classification, or of analogy, to which entering students are strikingly oblivious; but it is simply fatal to stuff the head of a freshman with generalizations or abstractions that rest on experiences with which he has had no acquaintance and has no means of judging. The freshman should simply be forbidden to express a generalization for which he cannot furnish at least a substantial part of the tangible concrete particulars. The great job is to get him to feel that the particulars which he regards as trivial



are worth noticing and putting in words. His vocabulary and style, his whole mental apparatus, will gain in definiteness and naturalness to the extent that he can be made to see that the implications of the concrete will carry him some part of the way toward successful generalization, while constant moving-about in the unrealized worlds of ambitious abstraction will never lead him to the concrete.

There is probably no one sensible solution of the problem of an appropriate reading content for the freshman course. It seems to me inevitable that some sort of anthology must be used as a common classroom text, if only to present a variety of content in digestible chunks—a variety of problems about which curiosity can exercise itself, a variety of ways of taking the world, a variety of modes of thinking, a variety of literary methods and forms. Many fairly usable anthologies meet this purpose in many different ways.

Beyond the anthology, the student should be set to reading actual volumes and to delving into such sources as he can profitably explore. It is exceedingly important that modern students should be led to do their reading in wholes and not in fractions. A colleague of mine remarked that many students nowadays have the idea that literature is written in excerpts. They are so stuffed with textbooks and fragmentary readings that it does not dawn on some of them that a chapter is not a book, or that a snippet in an anthology does not represent the design that an author conceived and executed entire.

If there is a natural subject matter for the freshman course, one might suppose that it is the ancient discipline of rhetoric. But I think we are coming to realize that rhetoric is not an air-fed plant somehow subsisting in its own peculiar medium, like a tropical fish curiously preserved in a glass-walled tank. Certainly it does not so subsist for any practical writer, and I do not think we have any right to suppose that a freshman can learn to express himself, to gain command of his mind and pen, by means fundamentally different from those that a writer knows that he must undergo. The art of writing is not separable from having something to say. The form of any piece is a part of its content; alter the form and you alter the content. The method and design are simply the method and design of that specific idea or impression which is the starting-point of the whole performance. I am inclined to wonder whether a

textbook of rhetoric is an indispensable instrument. Certainly the handbook that classifies externally recognizable errors and provides a set of check numbers to be used by the instructor in correcting themes is simply evidence of the extent to which composition teaching still relies on correction. When student bodies are large and instructors few and overburdened, such procedure may be unavoidable. But let us not deceive ourselves into expecting any success from it. I see no reason to believe that anything can take the place of an actual personal and psychological diagnosis of a student's difficulties with language. This diagnosis must always take place in relation to some range of content which it is, or should be, natural for the student to deal with.

I think, therefore, that the content of a freshman course must always be eclectic. It must in a real sense be the student's content, not merely the instructor's. What the student writes about must spring from the other courses he is taking as well as from the course which the catalogue labels English. It must spring from his own experience and his power to classify, interpret, and think about it. It must spring from any hobbies he may have that are capable of intellectual exploration or that can be related in any way to the whole context of what he and his fellow-students are doing. It is difficult for a teacher trained in literature to do the work of correlation that must be done if the freshman course is to be real and successful. But in the freshman course we must all make such efforts as we can to promote the correlation of papers which are to be graded for the use of English with the content of all other studies which freshmen are undertaking.

Ultimately all human endeavors must meet the test of success. For the freshman English course this test is measured by the tangible improvement we can see in the work of our students. The amount of improvement we can discern is so slight as to be our greatest temptation to cynicism. Yet some improvement does take place. There may be as many as a half-dozen fairly exciting cases of it in any given freshman section. There are other more moderate examples which we shall despise less the more we appreciate the real difficulties that many students have with reading, thinking, and writing. I feel sure that improvement rests on a limited number

of important points in the main. It occurs in relation to content. No student learns to write better by regarding writing as an artificial exercise, by writing those familiar themes which have no subject—the curse and despair of the freshman course. I do not believe that much improvement can take place unless a pretty well-qualified instructor can meet individually with the student at sufficiently frequent intervals really to undertake the sort of individual diagnosis I have talked about. The very best condition for improvement exists when the student himself feels a real need and a real purpose to deal successfully in language with some kind of content. Over this purpose or motive the instructor often has little control. By friendship, by moral suasion, he can elicit it to some small extent, but it must come fundamentally from the student himself, and this is one of the hampering and limiting conditions on the success of the freshman course. If the instructor himself is actually and clearly convinced that improvement in writing depends in great part on the student's possession of content and of purpose to master it more completely by expressing it in language, he is certainly in a much better position to arouse and encourage this indispensable motive in his class. Colleges and faculties as a whole can help the work of the freshman course in this important respect by explicitly sanctioning and encouraging its work.

But I believe that we shall never meet our full possible success until the colleges make some united effort to bring order and consistency into the primary- and secondary-school teaching of language. This is an important educational trust for which I believe the colleges have a definite responsibility. We should be doing something more than complain and lament. I do not mean that the colleges should prescribe either the method or the content of secondary- and primary-school studies in language. That would be a grave and tragic error. A gulf is properly recognized between the methods and needs of education at these various levels. I have a deep respect for the conscientiousness of the secondary-school teachers whom I know in grappling with the immense contemporary problems of democratic education. It is they who have the experience and knowledge of method appropriate to the task. It is they who are really fighting the battle in the trenches, and we should approach

them with sincere humility. But I think that the colleges could at least define clearly the capacities in the use of language for reading, writing, and thinking which they expect entering students to possess—define them not in terms of a vague literary ideal, but in terms of their own experience of what reasonably well-equipped freshmen can do at the point of entrance and what they should be able to do. It is unreasonable that so much freshman work should consist of undoing previous intellectual damage or of constructing linguistic intelligence from the ground up. As it is now, an entering freshman may never have written a theme in his life before on any subject in any course, or he may have written a great deal which has done him no good. He may never have heard of the parts of speech or the simplest terms of syntax and sentence structure. He may have no conception of what a sentence is. Or he may carry a heavy baggage of theoretical grammar totally divorced from the world of experience or from the primary intellectual categories of cause and effect, general and particular, and the other modes by which the mind maintains some sort of order. As long as this situation continues, higher education is corrupted at the root. It seems to me time that the colleges, in a cautious but firm united effort, should try to see that the foundations of language study are better laid. I see no other way of even attempting to gain any real measure of success with the task in which freshman English is a midway point and which does not cease when the Ph.D. writes his thesis.

## ROUND TABLE

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### SHOULD FREEDOM OF SPEECH BE ALLOWED IN STUDENT PUBLICATIONS?

In a country that boasts of its freedom of speech, should college students be allowed within the columns of school publications to criticize their professors or even the administration? It is comparatively simple to take a group of young people who like to write and to add to their past established writing habits a few simple fundamentals of journalism such as lead sentences following the who-what-when-where-why-and-how formula. It is not so difficult to show the differences between news and editorial writing, society chaff and sport items, or the tone that distinguishes an account of a good-time party from that which describes the passing-away of a classmate.

The headache that comes to the faculty member held responsible for student publications arrives when the student writers rebel against recording the usual beautiful thoughts about spring and start giving an honest, albeit oftentimes crude, impression of certain campus conditions or faculty members who more than likely deserve the criticism because of lack of tactfulness or academic ability. The faculty adviser, let's say, rushed with other matters, has had full confidence that what is written will be "proper," only to be awakened rudely to the harsh fact that someone has slipped something over. In the meantime the students chuckle with glee and cry for more, the faculty buzzes with various degrees of shocked surprise, while the administration frowns and even blows up. In this American "land of the free" some undergraduate has committed the foul crime of saying in print what he believes.

This problem of a suppressed college press is all the more serious in a state-supported institution because the president usually holds his job upon the strength of a minimum friction reputation. So long as the surface is smooth, the educational depth is not so important. One such prexy—who has since lost his job for being too much of a politician and too little of an educator, strange as that may seem—spent a full hour in a faculty meeting condemning an article written by a student who had inferred that the faculty was unfair in its grading system.

It didn't help matters that the lad had touched truthfully upon a



situation where certain professors had been grading almost entirely upon personal likes and dislikes—that seemed to make the crime only more heinous. The president, with his eye cocked upon possible reactions from the state board of education, pulled the faculty adviser publicly over the coals of his choicest scorn and ended by giving definite and distinct orders that nothing was to go into that college paper without the cautious word-by-word approval of said adviser. Thereafter, every item was to be scanned carefully before it went to the printshop—or else.

In another state-supported institution the college weekly ran a "Walter Winchell" column of the type that asked: "Why Myrtle J. had not gone to the prom, as planned, with Sammy S?" Some of the items bordered upon crudeness and possibly should have been suppressed—but the students stood in line in front of the bookstore to get the weekly newspaper in order to see upon whom the latest dirt had been dished. The editorial staff was full and had a long waiting list. Imitation being the sincerest form of flattery, unofficial papers occasionally were being published just for the fun of it. Journalistic writing was having a great boom.

Then certain influential members of the faculty frowned upon the policies of the paper. The adviser, who had been enjoying the enthusiasm of the workers and the popularity of the journal, was advised to eliminate the offending column and certain other features. Thereafter, in the place of the scandal sheet there appeared a column of poetry exploiting the soulful beauties of the daisy or the values of study. Needless to say, after the first few issues of the purified publication there was no more standing line to get the college paper—and just as mysteriously the waiting list for staff positions disappeared.

In a third state college, student journalists have enjoyed exceptionally liberal privileges of free expression of student thought. When a staff member has felt like criticizing a faculty member, he says what he wishes so long as the jibe is given in approved polite form. A young professor arrived on the campus and soon succeeded in making himself highly unpopular because of tactless high-handed classroom methods. The college newspaper made several wisecracks. The young man was deeply offended, and after a few issues and matters did not seem to improve, he rushed to the president with his tale of woe.

Prexy, adjudged in most things as being a man of unusually good balance, expressed surprise although he undoubtedly had read every item when published. He then told the sensitive new faculty member a few pointed truths—that, as the president responsible for the welfare of students as well as teachers, he was glad to discover what those who paid

tuition thought of a new faculty member, that where there was much criticism there undoubtedly was some reason therefor, and that if he himself were the new professor, he would take to heart some of the things that were being said and perhaps start a little self-reformation.

Young people going through college statistically have much better opportunities to become leaders in our American democracy than do those lacking this privilege of a higher education. In halls of learning as well as in political campaigns the ideals of the founding fathers are bellowed from mountain top to mountain top. Expression of these ideals makes sweet music to the ears as orators speak them. If freedom of the press is an important factor in our American way of living, most certainly college students who are being trained for leadership in the nation's future social-economic-and-political life should have every opportunity to practice this freedom of speech in their college publications.

Too often in the past our faculty management of men and women who are legally old enough to get married has smacked of the European totalitarian flavor. If professors have the right to criticize students in classroom work or campus conduct, and thousands can testify to the fact that this privilege is assumed, then students should have equal rights to criticize these same faculty members or campus conditions. This final statement is made with the idea in mind that the America of the future will be a democracy in fact as well as name and not a dictatorship disguised by verbal democratic idealisms.

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#### CURRENT LITERATURE IN THE SURVEY COURSE

The mere suggestion that something more should be added to the American literature course that is taught historically will undoubtedly cause some eyebrow-raising. For a number of years, however, I have been interested in the possible use of current literature in such courses, and I propose to show one method of introducing it. The general principle which underlies my desire for such an arrangement is this: Many students who have taken a course in American literature leave college with no knowledge whatever of current trends and, at the worst, with no desire for such knowledge. Later they may try to make the transition, only to face a confusing welter of authors and titles. If I as an instructor envisage the reading of current authors as one of the ultimate objectives of

the study of American literature, it is my obligation to get my students started while they are in my course.

A good way to emphasize the significance of the historical method is to bring out as quickly as possible the relationship between the past and the present. When students realize that a thorough understanding of early literature is productive of both light and enjoyment in reading current books, they manifest greater enthusiasm for both. The method which I have employed to attain this end is the following. At the beginning of the year, I require all my students to subscribe to either the *New York Times Book Review* or the *Saturday Review of Literature*. The initial problem thereafter is to lead them into an intelligent use of the reviews. When this has been done, and they begin to manifest a lively interest in some of the authors and books, I tell them that the class will be allowed to purchase at least one book a week for the express use of the American literature class, the library supplying the funds. The books purchased in this manner are catalogued as expeditiously as possible and placed upon a special shelf in the classroom, constituting as weeks pass a growing library that possesses unique interest for the students who are building it. These books, of course, can be drawn out and used under the conditions prevailing for any other library book.

Undoubtedly a number of questions will at once arise. For example, how much time does the plan involve? Ordinarily one period every other week is enough. On the day designated, each student is expected to come to class prepared to discuss the two or three books which appear to her to be most desirable for purchase. At times there is striking unanimity, and it is easy to make a selection. At other times there is marked divergence, and it may be necessary to investigate further before the final decision. Then there is the question of the use of the books purchased. First, the students are urged to read them for their own personal interest and satisfaction, thereby promoting a basic purpose of any course in literature—namely, independent enjoyment of books. Since all the students are expected to read a number of books to satisfy the requirements of the course, they frequently make their selection from this special library. The reports or discussions which the students are asked to give afford the largest opportunity to ascertain the relationship between the new book and the other subject matter of the course. Sometimes these correlations are extremely interesting and timely—for instance, when the class purchased Canby's *Thoreau*, Wade's *Margaret Fuller*, and Kenyon's verse novel, *Scarlet Anne*. More frequently, perhaps, relationships are less obvious but nevertheless significant; for example, a student who reads *Satanstoe* and

then *The Grapes of Wrath* will be led to do some thinking both about the development of the novel and about the use of social themes. In like manner students find it interesting to compare Cooper's novels with those of Kenneth Roberts, and such novels as *Horse-Shoe Robinson* with *Drums along the Mohawk* or *The Tree of Liberty*. However, the purpose of this method is not primarily synthesis; if that is possible, so much the better. The important thing is to make the students conscious of the fact that American literature is a continuous, growing concern and simultaneously to add to their enjoyment of literature by giving them a speaking acquaintance with some of the better books currently published and discussed.

In conclusion I might point out a number of concomitant benefits which this method has revealed. First, books have assumed a much larger importance in the daily conversation of the students than formerly; they are more interested in becoming acquainted with the books that the well-informed person apparently should know. Second, the students are somewhat more discriminating in what they want to read. Third, I have observed an increased desire for building personal libraries. An extension of this desire is that the students have become more conscious of the possibilities of books as gifts. Many times since I began to use this technique such questions as this have been put to me: "Which of these books do you think it would be best to buy for so and so?" It is not an easy position to be in, and I often hesitate to give advice, not knowing very much about "John" or "Father"; but the thing I like is that books have come alive and that I am having opportunities to discuss them with my students. Surely that is a reasonably good guaranty that a literature course is accomplishing one of its purposes.

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## CURRENT ENGLISH FORUM

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*Should I use "is" or "are" in the sentence "Lots of fun and plenty of friends (are, is) his idea of what makes life pleasant"? Why? Would the alternative be correct, too?*

I. D.

The problem is created by the circumstance that two co-ordinate substantives precede the verb *to be* and a substantive in the singular follows it. This question is discussed in Curme's *Syntax*, page 50:

In common practice, however, many find it difficult to distinguish subject and predicate here. The present tendency is to avoid a decision on this perplexing point by regulating the number of the copula by a mere formal principle—namely, as the nominative before the copula is often the subject, it has become the rule to place the copula in accord with it, whether it be a subject or a predicate. . . . On the other hand, as the noun which follows the copula is often the subject, we frequently, especially in older English, find the copula in accord with it: "All that we found of the deer *were* the ragged hide, some patches of hair, cracked bones, and two long ears" (Zane Grey, in *Harper's Monthly*, August, 1925). "What it (i.e., the air) unquestionably did contain *were* carbon monoxide gas and prussic acid gas" (E. E. Free, "The Origin of Life," in *Forum*, October, 1925). "His pavilion round about him *were* dark waters and thick clouds of the skies" (*Psalms*, XVIII, 11). "The wages of sin *is* death" (*Romans*, VI, 23).

*The workbook which we use includes "for" in the list of co-ordinate conjunctions. When "for" obviously means "because," why shouldn't its clause be a dependent one and the sentence be complex?*

A. J. R.

The question you pose, and it is a very pertinent one, is answered as follows in Curme's *Syntax*, (p. 350):

The coördinating conjunction *for* has causal force approaching that of subordinating *as* and *since*: 'He could not have seen me, *for* I was not there.' The proposition introduced by coördinating *for* is in current English always a remark loosely added to a preceding proposition to explain it. Hence it can never precede the main proposition as an *as*-clause or a *since*-clause [or a *because*-



clause, to frame the answer in terms of your question]. *For* also differs from *as* and *since* in that it can introduce an explanation that does not contain the idea of cause: 'It is morning, *for* (not *as* or *since*) the birds are singing.'

A. H. M.

*In the "Current English Forum" for February there is a question concerning the case of the pronoun following the infinitive "to be." The answer given seems contrary to information contained in many grammar texts.*

*May I offer the following as sources of information on this subject:*

1. Smith-McNulty, *Essentials in English, Book III: Laboratory Method*, pp. 130-31. Wichita, Kan.: McCormick-Mathers.

"When the infinitive 'to be' has a subject, it is preceded and followed by the objective case.

"When the infinitive 'to be' has no subject, it is followed by the nominative case."

*Examples given:*

1. I knew it to be him.
2. The best athlete seems to be he.

2. Hayes-Challman, *Sure Way Minimum Essentials of Correct English*, p. 39. Minneapolis: Correct English Service.

"When there is no object for the infinitive 'to be,' the completer is in the nominative case."

*Example given:* I wish to be she.

3. Clark Allen, *Corrective English*, p. 118. Chicago: John Winston Co.

D. K.

*Will you discriminate between "hanged" and "hung"? Can an animal be "hanged" and would a person be "hung" if, say, he was merely suspended by a rope under his arms?*

W. D.

The past of *hang* is now *hung*. The language of the law is archaic, so that in legal contexts *hanged* is still used. It doesn't make any difference who or what is hung or how; the point is the type of writing or the subject. Webster says: "With reference to the death penalty *hanged* is preferred to *hung*." That is the point. Nobody ever needs to write *hanged*, though if he is a lawyer or a legislator or if he is writing about the death penalty, he perhaps would. *Hanged* is, I think, going out of use even in such contexts. The problem hardly seems worth a grown person's serious consideration.

## NEWS AND NOTES

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The meaning of Ben Jonson's remark that Shakspeare had "small Latin" is the subject of "What Shakspeare Learned at School" by David Brown, in *Bucknell University Studies* for January. Records of the Stratford grammar school indicate that Shakspeare studied the usual Elizabethan school curriculum under teachers who were above average. From the statutes of fifteen representative Elizabethan schools we learn that the average boy read, spoke, and wrote Latin for six or seven years. The most common author read was Terence; other favorites were Cicero, Sallust, Horace (the *Epistles*), Ovid (the *Metamorphoses*), and Virgil. Shakspeare's plays, particularly the earlier ones, contain quotations from the school grammars and readers and also allusions to Latin pieces read in the schools. He frequently employs a Latinized vocabulary, more often, in fact, than Ben Jonson. The emphasis upon proverbs and maxims, such as the *Disticha* of Cato, probably gave Shakspeare material for Polonius, Touchstone, and other fools or partially ridiculous characters. On the whole, with the exception of Ovid, the Latin fare of the school did not appeal to Shakspeare; its morality was arid to his free and generous spirit. It did help him to a vocabulary, a superficial knowledge of the art of rhetoric, and much miscellaneous information.

Successful plays must be intelligible and stimulating to a thousand people every night, and, therefore, they must have themes of general interest. In "The Plight of the Dramatist" (*Harper's* for March) Walter Prichard Eton accounts for the present relatively stagnant seasons in the drama by contrasting the large number of themes which are dead with the small number which remain alive. Hundreds of plays have made their appeal on the theme of the comedy of manners—the absurdity of those who don't belong or, vice versa, the absurdity of those who do; the theme of the unequal marriage—*The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*; and the themes of seduction, the double standard, and children in revolt against parents. But the social changes of our time have killed the significance of all these once practical themes. The themes which remain practical, unfortunately, are very difficult. First is the play of social injustice, which has been used for propaganda so extensively that the public is weary of it; second, the

theme of the stale, flat, or restricted life; third, the timeless conflict of good and evil; and, fourth, the modern spirit of doubt, irresolution, confusion. Philip Barry, O'Neill, Sherwood, and a few others have written fine plays on these difficult themes, but they offer little encouragement to the writer of comedy or to the old-time popular dramatist.

The fact that in our time a play can be made from almost any novel and a motion picture from almost any play means that the theater has not been brought to its own perfection. Our theater is mixed and scrambled says Robert Edmond Jones in "Toward a New Stage"—the March *Theatre Arts*. Stage realism, the prevailing convention, is photographic, unsuited to the play, which requires from the designer only a sense of place, an atmosphere of the theme or thought. By his vivid lines, Shakespeare developed this atmosphere on a relatively bare stage, and many experiments in our day show how effectively a sense of place may be created by other than realistic settings—for example, *Our Town* or *Julius Caesar* as produced at the Mercury Theatre against bare brick walls with only a low platform in the center of the stage.

More imaginative scenic conventions will allow the designer to perfect the stage, which should be made beautiful, austere, sparing in detail, and rich in suggestion. It is desirable that the setting become only a brief ceremony of welcome, after which it may take wings. A motion-picture screen at the beginning of *He Who Gets Slapped*, for example, might show the life of a little circus. When we succeed in making a production that is everything a motion picture is not and nothing a motion picture is, the old lost magic will return to the theater.

The qualities distinguishing radio programs, whether comedy, music, or reporting, from their counterparts elsewhere are defined by Davidson Taylor in "Good Radio," *Theatre Arts* for March. In the first place good radio must appeal in its own special terms: it must hold the isolated listener, intelligently utilize words, music, recognizable sounds and noise—its only means of expression—and operate in fixed time limits, which means that its form must be good. Listeners are impatient; hence radio entertainment must be continuous and lively. Evanescent as radio is, rehearsals are keyed toward a single performance, done at high tension. The radio medium is especially suited to music, and drama on the air allows such freedom in time and place and in imagination that unusual effects of horror, fantasy, and comedy have been achieved. Nobody understands the meaning of addressing millions at once, but when a

broadcast is good radio, something returns to the performer which exhilarates and sometimes awes. Such broadcasts as the first performance of "The Fall of the City" and Paul Robeson's singing of "Ballad for Americans" prove that radio may momentarily become the receptacle of inspiration. Good radio is an art.

How shall we continue in a time of war, mobilization, and defense industry? The answer of Rev. Bernard D. McCarthy, in the *English Leaflet* for March, is "English as Usual." Literature exemplifies the dignity of man, gives faith in man's ability to rise above the sordid and the mean. English literature, furthermore, expresses the value of sympathy and tolerance. The Catholic Chaucer and the free-thinking Puritan Milton have helped to form it. We are indebted to the Irish, the French, the Italians, and the Germans; to aristocrats and the sons of stablekeepers and butchers. In the crucible of literature all men are equal. And, third, from literature we gain perspective. Men have advanced the standards of liberty and knowledge, and the world has taken comfort, because they labored even in the most dismal periods. Literature presents no sure-fire panaceas; indeed, much of it was born in turmoil and carries the marks of its origin. It may aid us and those we instruct in viewing the world as it is.

Strong encouragement for the work of the "Thirty Schools" is Dorothy Dunbar Bromley's article in the March *Harper's*, "Education for College or for Life?" After analyzing the favorable records made in college by graduates of the "Thirty Schools" and heartily approving the progressive courses of study developed by the schools, Miss Bromley emphatically expresses the need for support to the progressive movement from the colleges. She concludes:

Not until the colleges give the secondary schools the rope they need will the latter be free to find ways and means for educating ten million young people for the business of living in a free society. The Eight Year Study has proved that the colleges have nothing to lose and more than a little to gain on their own account. It is time that we base our system of education on a democratic rather than on an aristocratic ideal.

Indicting the schools for neglect of the superior student, Elizabeth Van Schaack forcefully repeats in the February *Bulletin of the Kansas Association of Teachers of English* a criticism which has so far been largely ineffective. Pasadena boasts that 95 per cent of its population of high-school age is in school, and the success of progressive schools generally

in making the curriculum attractive to the majority of students is to be applauded. But a professor of education continues to say "The good minds will take care of themselves," and a recent book on the teaching of English tells the teacher to address the lower 20 per cent. For the sake of those who can reach no higher than "Sally in Our Alley," English classes labor over poems which the bright students read with easy comprehension. Tutors in England are appalled at the waste entailed in the system requiring a teacher to read masses of compositions and protest that the American system is undemocratic in that it forces superior students without money to work their way through college. That we neglect the superior student is apparent in the *Education Index* for 1922 and 1932, which lists seven articles on superior college students, fifteen on failures in college, forty-two on backward children, and thirty-three on superior children. John Milton revolted against the educative diet of sow-thistles and brambles available in his time and provided a better diet for young Miltons. He was wrong in thinking that his plan "may prove much more easy in the essay, than it now seems at a distance"; nevertheless we must make the essay.

By his last two books, *Men Must Act* and *Faith for Living*, Lewis Mumford has caused his readers to wonder why he, one of our leading intellectuals, should have deserted a liberal and pacifist position for an unqualified militant attitude. In the *Southern Review* for winter James Farrell explains the nature and the origins of "The Faith of Lewis Mumford." A bankrupt reformist, Mr. Mumford now brings into the open the reactionary implications which were always latent in his writing. He idealizes the medieval feudal system and believes in the organic state. In 1932 the vigorous interest in athletics and community welfare which he saw in Germany made him think that that country was on the road to a healthy national order, but today he damns scores of his fellow-men for not having taken fascism seriously. He unfairly equates Marxism and Stalinism and argues that the Marxists are wrong because they see ideas merely as the shadows of economics. Russia, he has discovered, was the first fascist state. Speaking in terms of holy crusades, he is prepared to abrogate civil liberties at home as a means of destroying fascism abroad.

The tradition of political thought which Mumford represents was developed characteristically, in the nineteenth century, by De Maistre and De Bonald and, in the twentieth century, by Patrick Geddes [with whom Mr. Mumford at one time studied in England]. The nineteenth-century scholars advocated the Catholic idea of unity of society in God.



God is the head of society, his representatives the pope and the monarch, all classes the various parts of the social organism. To these concepts, Le Play, a scientist and sociologist, added the analogy of the employer and worker to the feudal baron and peasant. He saw the family as the miniature of the state and considered the patriarchal order as the type best fitted for the ideal society. These are the men of whom Marx and Engels wrote: "The aristocracy, in order to rally the people to them, waved the proletarian alms-bag in front for a banner." Patrick Geddes, whose writing at the time of the first World War resembles Mumford's, kept the organic concept of society, though he dropped the Catholic theology. His metaphysical concepts were, instead, evolution and vitalism.

Mumford, with a similar rationale, interprets medieval history as organic, modern history as disintegrated. Social reform is the treatment and removal of social disease. It consists in adaptation: "a normalized mode of consumption to determine a rationalized mode of production" and community welfare to be promoted within the community by community leaders.

Geddes interpreted the first World War as a struggle against "Prussic" materialism; Mumford interprets the present war as against "pragmatic liberalism." "Pragmatic liberals" include John Dewey, Neville Chamberlain, and Erskine Caldwell. "Ideal liberalism," the opposite, Mumford confesses he cannot define. He is opposed to modern empirical thought and sets up an ideal pattern for society which resembles both the medieval community and the fascist state. Though once disillusioned about the first World War, he advocates sustaining the present war but is unable to find new reasons, his assertions duplicating those of Patrick Geddes twenty-five years ago.

## BOOKS

### AMERICAN ENGLISH GRAMMAR

*American English Grammar*<sup>1</sup> is the report of an investigation of the difference between Standard and Vulgar American English as represented by some two thousand letters in the government files at Washington. Professor Fries's book is one of great importance to teachers of English because it provides the necessary background and material for a true understanding of social variations in grammar. It is valuable to the scholar because these differences in the grammatical structure of American English have here, for the first time, been examined scientifically. The conclusions depend on what uneducated Americans actually write, not on what humorists imagine they might write. The letters studied were divided into three groups according to the occupation and education of the writers. Group I, college graduates of standing in their community, were considered to write Standard English. Group II, people whose formal education ranged from one year of high school to one year of college, businessmen, foremen, and so on, are those who use Common English. Group III, those whose occupations were strictly manual and whose education did not go beyond eighth grade, were considered writers of Vulgar English. In general, the language of Group II was disregarded in order to contrast the highest and lowest group. The practice of Group I is compared with that of Group II in the forms of words, in the use of such function words as *of* and *have* (auxiliary), and in word order.

The most interesting result of these studies is the demonstration that Vulgar (written) English does not differ nearly so much from Standard as writers like Mencken would have us believe. Vulgar English is not another language with a grammar of its own but is English that deviates occasionally from standard grammar. The great value of Fries's statistics is that he includes the instances of "correct," as well as "incorrect," forms in Group III, thus avoiding the usually exaggerated estimate of the proportion of eccentricities in Vulgar English. The differences between the extreme groups are summarized at the end of each chapter. Thus the so-

<sup>1</sup> Charles Carpenter Fries, *American English Grammar: The Grammatical Structure of Present-Day English with Especial Reference to Social Differences or Class Dialects*. (National Council of Teachers of English, "English Monographs," No. 10.) New York and London: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1940. Pp. vii + 313. \$2.50.

called "double" comparative is found in neither group, and the superlative rather than the comparative for two appears in both. *As* introducing a clause of reason appears in both Standard and Vulgar English, but is two and a half times as frequent in the Vulgar English material. *Since* introducing a causal clause appears only in Group I, Standard English. The tone of the letters in Group III seems to be more casual and conversational than that of Group I. I hope it will not be thought that *she says to tell you* is improper English in conversation simply because it happens to appear only in Group III. Fries is fully aware that the ideal material would be records of spontaneous speech. In Group III, especially, the labored expression of people unaccustomed to writing may sometimes result in unnatural constructions. Records of conversation would probably reveal more deviations from standard grammar than are found in the letters of this group. One is surprised to discover so few instances of incorrect preterits of the type *seen* and *give*. *Come*, which is an extremely common preterit in conversation, does not happen to appear.

One of the most instructive chapters is that on the history and function of word order in English. This should be read by those who deplore on principle the use of any noun modifier and are consequently obliged to resort to the most cumbersome circumlocutions to avoid a useful and unambiguous collocation of nouns. Noun modifiers are shown to be characteristic of Standard English, the only instance occurring in the Vulgar English materials being *my soldier boy*.

Fries's book is not intended to settle particular questions of usage, but rather to enable the teacher to make grammatical instruction deal with realities instead of outmoded rules. It is a fine example of applied scholarship, of the way in which careful research may help us to understand the uses of our mother-tongue.

ROBERT J. MENNER

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#### WHY WE TALK AS WE DO AND SHALL

A pleasantly written book by Professors Margaret M. Bryant and Janet Rankin Aiken<sup>1</sup> develops the rather broad thesis that "the English language and grammar are the products of the group thinking of billions of people whose minds have worked psychologically rather than logically; and the fruit of this group thinking is a system which reflects behavioristic patterns rather than formal regularity."

<sup>1</sup> *Psychology of English*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1940. Pp. 229.

The general thesis that our language is not a logical system is amply demonstrated with apt examples; the thesis is of course unassailable, since logic, being an auxiliary language, is amenable to a control which English, a natural language, will not suffer. The thesis that our language develops according to behavioristic patterns is practically a tautology, since what we call language is an abstraction from the total complex of behavior. There can be little quarrel with the theme of the book.

But, when the authors get down to cases, they propose to explain specific linguistic changes as products of such human traits as modesty, impatience, frankness, and laziness. Some of these explanations, such as laziness as the cause of specific sound changes, are too general to be useful. Phoneticians accept economy of effort as an ever present and powerful factor in sound change, but they accept it as an underlying assumption, just as aviation experts accept gravitation as an assumed factor that need not be specified in "explaining" a particular airplane crash. Other proposals, as that the vowel in *cat* may be disfavored partly because a speaker has to grimace unpleasantly to pronounce it, are capable of psychometric study and cannot be usefully discussed without such study. Still other proposals, as that request forms have been supplanting imperative forms as a concomitant of increasing social democracy, are interesting and plausible and will suggest profitable studies of syntactical changes.

The fact that this book is anecdotal and deductive rather than systematic and statistical suggests that it is not written for the serious student. The suggestion becomes a certainty when we find frequent references to linguists and experts and authorities who turn out to be handbook writers, not language scholars; when we find the twin dodos "group mind" and "group thinking" revived; when we find the change of *radii* to *radiuses* classed as a spelling change (p. 63); when we find a word of Chaucerian vintage called a recent creation (p. 128); and when the attitude of modern semanticists toward abstractions is lumped as dogmatic opposition (p. 222).

In this book the authors take a prodigious leap ahead of plodding linguistic science, which we hope will some day produce careful correlations of linguistic changes and other social phenomena. Their speculations are uniformly readable and interesting, but they are speculations, not verifiable knowledge about our language.

JAMES B. McMILLAN

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

THE "TYPES OF ENGLISH SERIES"<sup>1</sup>

## I

*Types of English Fiction*, edited by Hardin Craig and John W. Dodds, should be useful in classes on the history of the novel, not to furnish the backbone of the course, but to fill in the inevitable chinks and crannies. The novel is a tremendous field, and even the most industrious college student cannot be expected to read complete examples of all its forms. Though no two instructors will agree on which novels they wish their classes to read entire, many will be grateful for a book to which they may turn for short samples of the novels which they, individually, consider of lesser importance.

*Types of English Fiction* presents brief selections, about fifteen or twenty pages long, from thirty-two outstanding novelists, starting with the author of *Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, Sir Thomas Malory, and John Lyly, and coming down to the present day. Each selection is preceded by a page or two giving the information necessary to place the novel and the novelist in the stream of the whole.

The teacher who wishes his students to read a condensed history of the novel will find what he is looking for in the excellent forty-page Introduction. On the other hand, the teacher who prefers to administer the history of the novel by means of his own lectures or of more detailed reading may do so without fear of being anticipated, assured that no student ever voluntarily reads an introduction. As to the wisdom exercised by the editors in their choice of authors, there can be little dispute except in the modern field, where the six authors chosen are Henry James, Conan Doyle, John Galsworthy, Joseph Conrad, Katherine Mansfield, and Virginia Woolf.

In format *Types of English Fiction* is modern and unusually attractive, an example of the really superior bookmaking given us more and more often by the publishers of our college texts.

RUTH C. CHILD

WELLESLEY COLLEGE

## II

*Types of English Drama*, edited by John W. Ashton, is a carefully chosen series of twelve plays illustrating major types in the English drama all the way from medieval to modern times. Each of the twelve plays included is provided with an accurate critical introduction, which includes pertinent biographical data, general historical comment on the

<sup>1</sup> Hardin Craig is the general editor and Macmillan the publisher.



type in question, and a carefully selected bibliography as a guide for future reading. As the editor indicates in his general preface, this volume is intended to serve as a means of introducing undergraduate students at least to some of the most important types of English and even American drama. There is every reason to suppose that it should fulfil this purpose admirably in colleges which find it advisable to base their survey courses on literary types.

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

PAUL MUESCHKE

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### III

*Types of English Poetry*, edited by Rudolf Kirk and Clara Marburg Kirk, of Rutgers University, includes not only an anthology of English poetry and much information about the history and the forms of poetry but enough mention of critical opinion to acquaint the student with several possible approaches to the subject.

The editors have chosen the historical approach through types, a familiar enough method, but, because they offer something more than the usual historical anthology, the book should be more stimulating than most of such texts. The Introduction is in itself a short textbook on poetry. In the first part, the "Uses of Poetry," the editors define poetry by summarizing the essays of Sidney, Dryden, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Arnold, thus giving the student, at the beginning, some sense of changing moods from century to century as well as a realization that there are many different opinions about poetry.

In the second section of the Introduction, called "Methods," rhythm, meter, rhyme, and imagery are explained through thorough and interesting analysis of poems.

In the anthology each of the three divisions—narrative, lyric, didactic poems—is preceded by a summary of the history of the form presented, with particular reference to some of the selections in the text. At the end of the Introduction and each of these three sections is a short but adequate bibliography.

The anthology itself consists for the most part of the best-known poems of major writers. It is difficult to remember that, familiar though they may be to the instructor, these poems are new to the student and, therefore, still represent the wisest selection.

This is not a book for poor students, for it has few notes and no biographical sketches; but for the average or superior student, it should be an excellent text.

UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE

MARY E. BURTON

## IN BRIEF REVIEW

[Mention under this head does not preclude review elsewhere.]

## FOR THE GENERAL READER

*H. M. Pulham Esquire.* By John P. Marquand. Little, Brown. \$2.50.

The author of *The Late George Apley* has again written a book of social satire which readers will hail with feryor. Bo-jo Brown and Harry Pulham went to one of "those country day schools for little boys" and later they went to Harvard. But it was the day school and his home and Boston (as the twig is bent) that made Harry what he was. Bill, from New York, had a different point of view. When the twenty-fifth anniversary of the class came and Harry wrote his "life," he relived his years for us—an unforgettable story and much of it strangely familiar to each reader. The father in Ellen Glasgow's new book is kin to Harry. We hope the young people in *H. M. Pulham* will be presented later. This is Harry's story.

*In This Our Life.* By Ellen Glasgow. Harcourt. \$2.50.

A Virginia family—father, mother, and two daughters—are central characters of this novel, and freedom—personal freedom—is the desperate goal of each member. The action of the story is based upon interpretation of the modern youth. "Were the brilliant promise and arrested fulfillment of modern youth merely outward signs of some obscure inner decay?" The prose is excellent, action is swift, and narrative compelling—yet this is not a triumphant novel.

*Under the Greenwood Tree, or The Mellstock Quire.* By Thomas Hardy. With wood engravings by Claire Leighton. Macmillan. \$3.50.

Many readers will remember the beautiful engravings done by Claire Leighton for her own *Four Hedges* and *Country Matters*. She is well acquainted with Hardy's country, and this fine illustrated edition of *Under the Greenwood Tree* will appeal to collectors of her own books and to lovers of Hardy.

*The Heritage of Hatcher Ide.* By Booth Tarkington. Doubleday. \$2.00.

As a work of Tarkington's later years, this book has a certain value: his view of modern problems of youth and unemployment contrasted with depressions of earlier days, his study of youth of "good old stock" and their struggle to take up their heritage of economic disturbances is hopeful. Into this book he has woven the philosophy acquired through his long experience, that young Hatchers have inherited from a long line an ability to "take it."

*One Thing in Common.* By Elizabeth. Doubleday. \$2.50.

The publication of an excellent novel, *Mr. Skeffington*, and its popularity, revived an interest in its author, whose death occurred very recently. Three of her best novels now appear in this one volume: "Vera," "The Enchanted April," "Love."

*The Months of Rain.* By Alice Lent Covert. Kinsey. \$2.50.

Many readers felt that *Return to Dust* was a better and more admirable picture of Oklahomans than *Grapes of Wrath*. This new story of the same people presents a farm family and a few of their friends. The youngsters are growing up and turning from the

land and the life they find narrow and uninteresting. They have not yet developed the sustaining pride and self-sufficiency of their parents, but there is a chance that they may do so.

*The Closed Door.* By Ronald MacDonald Douglas. Modern Age. \$2.50.

A psychological study of an abused Scottish working girl who runs away, is an amnesia victim, and finds herself in an asylum. The cruelties of ignorant, thwarted attendants add mystery and suspense to a sad story of human behavior.

*Casanova's Women.* By John Erskine. Stokes. \$2.50.

According to Erskine "the world's most irresistible lover" gave aid in a time of need to a rich old Venetian, Bragadin, who at once adopted Casanova as his son. After a month's trial the father gave the gay blade a bag of gold, good advice, and the suggestion that he travel for a year. In a somewhat chastened mood the young gambler departed and visited great cities as he had been advised, in each of which he met a young and beautiful woman whom he courted with fervor. Cleverly portrayed in Erskine's best manner.

*Olives on the Apple Tree.* By Guido d'Agostino. Doubleday. \$2.50.

This sensitive tale of Italians in America has clarity and meaning. One Italian, who loves the good earth and is disgusted with his fellows for their get-rich-quick hopes and their false ambitions, puts it thus: "You cheat the land that gives you a home because you throw away that which you have brought with you to make it richer and better. There can be no happiness for the man who is traitor to the past."

*The Pilgrim Hawk.* By Glenway Westcott. Harper. \$1.50.

This is a unique and complex story of three couples, two triangles, a Cockney chauffeur, and a falcon. The time is the 1920's; the characters are of different nationalities; the setting, Paris. A seemingly casual description of odd, idle, useless people develops into a story with a startling pattern of symbolism, a critical survey of life, and very definite insinuations about the emotional stability of people who assume no responsibilities.

*Mountain Meadow.* By John Buchan. Houghton. \$2.50.

The author's recent death and his autobiography, *Pilgrim's Way*, have given added interest to his posthumous novel, a tribute to courage and faith.

*Cheerfulness Breaks In.* By Angela Thirkell. Knopf.

For readers who crave something amusing.

*Reflections in a Golden Eye.* By Carson McCullers. Houghton. \$2.00.

This short book by the author of *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* is queer but has a certain fascination. Everybody in it is "pixylated."

*Hilton Head.* By Josephine Pinckney. Farrar. \$2.75.

A long historical novel set in Barbados and the coastal plains of the Carolinas and Florida. Harry Woodward, a young doctor in rebellion against the conventions of his English training, is the gallant roving hero.

*Milton and His Modern Critics.* By Logan Pearsall Smith. Little, Brown. \$1.50.

A witty, appreciative essay, discerning and entertaining. Comparable to *On Reading Shakespeare*.

*Poets of Our Time.* By Rica Brenner. Harcourt. \$2.50.

Biographies of nine modern poets, with critical evaluations of their works. They are: Stephen Vincent Benét, Vachel Lindsay, Archibald MacLeish, T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Sara Teasdale, Elinor Wylie, William B. Yeats.

*Salt of the Earth.* By Victor Holmes. Macmillan. \$2.50.

William Allen White has written an enthusiastic Introduction to this story of a country town as seen by the editor of a weekly newspaper. Names, dates, places, and author's names are fictitious. The foibles of human nature are revealed very clearly in intimate small-town life. The decency which the author finds inherent in man is in cheerful contrast to the books about thwarted, cruel, and subnormal characters so prevalent now.

*The Kaw.* By Floyd B. Streeter. Illustrated by Isabel Bates and Harold Black. Farrar. \$2.50.

This twelfth volume of the "Rivers of America Series" is the story of the Kansas River and the wheat country. The first chapters are fascinating stories about the wagon trails, overland freighting, mail stages, and eating houses. The account of the bloody days preceding the Civil War is followed by an excellent history of the cattle industry and cow towns, which led to railroad development. Blizzards, dust storms, the introduction of hard wheat by the Mennonites, packing houses, Bryan's campaign, educational systems, all have their place in this well-planned and comprehensive study of a river valley and the surrounding territory.

*Union Now with Britain.* By Clarence K. Streit. Harper. \$1.75.

The author advocates a union between the United States, Canada, Britain, Eire, Australia, New Zealand, and the Union of South Africa, with three purposes in view: to halt the spread of dictatorship and the invasion of America; to win the war; to win peace. This plan Streit calls "Federal Union."

*How America Lives.* By J. C. Furnas. Holt. \$3.00.

This volume, attractive in format, includes case histories of sixteen families typical of a cross-section of American life. This study was accomplished by the author and the staff of the *Ladies' Home Journal*, in which many of the stories have been printed. On the whole, it indicates that strength of character and determination to live, let live, and give one's children a better chance still characterize all classes.

*Crusader in Crinoline: The Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe.* By Forrest Wilson. Lippincott. \$3.75.

"Remarks in Retrospect," the Foreword, is an impressive acknowledgment of help received from librarians, friends, and Beecher-Stowe relatives in the very extensive research made by the author. There are attractive pictures. This is an absorbing study of a large, extraordinary family and their intellectual and emotional reactions to the social, political, and economic life of the America of their day, with a rich background, tumult-

tuous even as contrasted with the 1940's. "Where but in America" could it have happened? The scholarly charm of this prose gives dignity to a fine biography of an era.

*Fifty Poems.* By E. E. Cummings. Duell, Sloan, & Pearce. \$1.50.

Poems written since the publication of *Collected Poems*. Untermeyer says, "Cummings has received almost every sort of criticism except a detached one." Critics generally concede that his poetry is brilliant, singular, and "full of shocks."

*The Best One-Act Plays of 1940.* Edited by Margaret Mayorga. Dodd, Mead. \$2.50.

Full texts of the ten best one-act plays, chosen by a well-known dramatist, with an additional recommended list.

*New Directions in Prose and Poetry. 1940.* Edited by James Laughlin. Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions. \$3.50.

*New Directions*, the editor and publisher hope, is the rallying point for the literary advance guard and for writers whose originality or unconventionality have set them apart from the herd. Meant for the reader who craves creative originality, intellectual excitement, and an acquaintance with young writers. "Notes on Contributions," an excellent Preface, and a chapter on "Surrealism" are included.

*The Plays of Eugene O'Neill.* 3 vols. Random. \$7.50 a set; \$2.50 each.

A new and beautiful edition of twenty-nine plays.

*Reason in Madness: Critical Essays.* By Allen Tate. Putnam. \$2.50.

Mr. Tate attacks the limitations and negativism of academic scholarship.

*Love and Death.* By Llewellyn Powys. Simon. \$2.50.

A great writer, knowing that his death is near, sustains his courage by recalling memories of a vital life. Subtitled *An Imaginary Autobiography*. Completed shortly before Mr. Powys died.

*Behind God's Back.* By Negley Farson. Harcourt. \$3.50.

Negley Farson anticipated the importance of Africa in the present world-crisis. For seven months he drove over it in a car, penetrating remote parts of the country in search of information, of trends that might eventually give to Africa an important place in a civilized future world. Not a story of adventure, wild animals, and big game, this is an important and readable book.

*Rhymed Ruminations.* By Siegfried Sassoon. Viking. \$1.50.

Forty-two new lyrics by the author of *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*.

*The Basic Works of Aristotle.* Edited by Richard P. McKeon. Random. \$4.00.

The editor is dean of the Division of Humanities of the University of Chicago. Introduction and notes accompany the text, which includes the most important works of the philosopher complete and unabridged. Fifteen hundred pages.



*A Time To Speak: Poetry and the World of Today.* By Archibald MacLeish. Houghton. \$3.00.

A collection of essays on significant themes.

*Translations from the Chinese.* By Arthur Waley. Knopf. \$5.00.

Beautifully illustrated in color. Formerly published in two volumes.

*Where Angels Dared To Tread.* By V. F. Calverton. Bobbs-Merrill. \$3.00.

Historical fiction and recent Mormon books have made us more conscious of groups and religious sects that have sought to establish utopias in the United States. This study of such movements, ranging from Brook Farm to Father Divine, is quite interesting.

*The Redemption of Democracy.* By Hermann Rauschning. Alliance.

An impassioned plea for resistance to the Leviathan of National Socialism, representing a mystical faith in "a current sweeping us along" toward a better democracy and a greater peace. The tone is often religious and the imagery is sometimes fevered.

*Subject Index to Poetry: A Guide for Adult Readers.* Edited by Herbert Bruncken. American Library Association. \$3.25.

The poetry in 215 anthologies is elaborately indexed by subjects from "Aachen" and "Abbeys" to "Zane, Elizabeth," and "Zurich."

*Words and Human Nature: How To Choose and Use Effective Words.* By Edward Jones Kilduff. Harper. \$1.50.

Chapters on such practical points as connotation, euphemisms, and "prejudice words," with abundant illustrations from journalistic writing, popular fiction, popular oratory, and advertising. Shrewd and fluently written.

#### FOR THE INSTRUCTOR

*Psychology of the Teaching of English.* By Francis Shreve. Christopher Publishing House. \$2.50.

The objectives of English teaching are analyzed under such divisions as grammar and reading, and psychological principles are applied to the problem of realizing each set of objectives. Based upon a review of timely research in both psychology and the teaching of English, the book conveniently summarizes the current educational theories of English teachers. It is written lucidly but in the prevailing style of educational monographs.

*Johnson without Boswell.* Edited by Hugh Kingsmill. Knopf. \$2.50.

Johnson as he appears in his own letters and in the biographical portraits of men and women who knew him—Sir John Hawkins, Mrs. Thrale, and others. Mr. Kingsmill has arranged his material chronologically over the whole of Johnson's life and has left it without interpretative comment.

*Jonathan Swift and Women.* By Joseph Manch. "University of Buffalo Studies," Vol. XVI, No. 4. \$0.50.

Swift's savage poems on the affectations of women are explained in terms of social life in his period and with reference to the prevailing taste for satire. All his works are explored for evidence of his views regarding women and of his personal relations with them.

*The Redirection of Secondary Education.* By George M. Wiley. Macmillan. \$2.50.

The author emphasizes the significance of the social approach to the problems of adolescent growth and developing maturity. All phases of the secondary school are analyzed and defined in their relation to community life.

*Oratio in laudem artis poeticae (circa 1572).* By John Rainolds. With an Introduction and commentary by William Ringler and an English translation by Walter Allen, Jr. Princeton University Press. \$1.50.

The Latin text and the translation into English of an oration in praise of the art of poetry delivered in Oxford by John Rainolds in the late sixteenth century. An extensive introduction provides analysis of this neo-Latin Elizabethan essay in literary criticism. Detailed translator's notes are found at the end.

*The Health of College Students: A Report to the American Youth Commission of the American Council on Education.* By Harold S. Diehl and Charles E. Shepard. \$1.50.

A detailed survey of student health programs maintained by colleges and universities in the United States. The incidence of all types of disease and physical defects is reported in an illuminating series of tables and summaries.

*What Reading Does to People.* By Douglas Waples. University of Chicago Press. \$2.00.

The authors have made an exhaustive study of the distribution of book and periodical material in the United States and have examined the sociological and psychological data which throw light upon the effects of the various types of reading upon attitudes and behavior. Of greatest interest, perhaps, is their treatment of the literature of escape and of the literature of social significance.

*Arthurian Romance and Modern Poetry and Music.* By William Albert Nitze. University of Chicago Press. \$1.00.

The legend of King Arthur is here traced in its various forms in the poetry of Tennyson and contemporaries like Robinson and Elliot and in the operas of Wagner.

#### FOR THE COLLEGE STUDENT

*Contemporary American Biography.* Edited by John A. Beckwith and Geoffrey G. Coope. Harper. \$1.25.

A lively and varied collection of short biographies, interesting both because the range of representative personalities extends from Horatio Alger to Admiral Byrd and because the manner of writing differs as widely as Carl Van Doren's restrained "Elinor Wylie"

and John Dos Passos' impressionistic "Meester Veelson." Of special interest is the section of "Comparative Readings," in which partial portraits on the same subject but of different purposes are brought together.

*Machiavelli: The Prince and Other Works.* Edited by Allan H. Gilbert. Packard & Co. \$1.00.

This convenient text of Machiavelli is carefully edited, with footnotes and seventy-five page Introduction, by a scholar well fitted to the task. In addition to "The Prince," the most valuable selection is ten of the "Discourses on Livy."

*Freshman English.* By Clark Olney. Dryden Press. \$2.50.

The first section, "Student Writing," contains exercises in paragraph building, an anthology of student themes, and concise instructions for writing various types of exposition and narrative. Other sections cover "The Research Article," "Words and Their Functions," and sentence structure.

*Newspaper Handbook.* By Grant Milnor Hyde. Appleton-Century. \$2.25.

A revised edition of a popular handbook for classes in journalism "equipped with all the latest gadgets" and a timely chapter entitled "Applied Ethics."

*Types of English Prose.* Edited by Virgil B. Heltzel. Macmillan. \$1.50.

Designed for college freshman and sophomores, the prose selections are divided under such headings as "History," "The Letter," and "The Treatise," each section arranged chronologically. Since a large number of authors—from John Foxe to Bertrand Russell—are included, the book is composed mainly of excerpts. There is an introductory essay for each prose type.

*A Preface to Our Day.* Edited by Dwight L. Durling, Helen Gill Viljoen, Eleanor M. Sickels, and Israel Baroway. Dryden Press. \$2.50.

Solid nonfictional prose collected to meet the needs of a college sophomore class. Reading together Emerson and Laski on the function of the scholar in America, balancing fascist doctrine (Carlyle and Lawrence Dennis) against New Deal or socialist theories of a planned economy (Henry Wallace, William Morris, and G. D. H. Cole), and participating in the vital issues of scientific and aesthetic thinking are the opportunities which this book opens to college classes.

*Modern American Vistas.* Edited by Howard W. Hintz and Bernard D. N. Grebanier. Dryden Press. \$1.75.

An anthology of prose for college classes in literature or composition which is distinguished for its variety and liveliness both in subject matter and in form. Farrell, Sheean, Thurber, and Robinson (James Harvey) appear under "Vistas of the Mind." "How To Detect and Analyze Propaganda" precedes Walter Millis' dramatic essay on the scene in which the American Congress of 1917 voted to declare war.

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